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ABSTRACT

The contemporary dialogue on work needs to be placed within an historical perspective so as not to view issues now coming to the fore as faddish or mere fallout from the sixties. Today's society still contends with tension between the values of pre-industrial America and those of the evolving corporate state. The crux of this ongoing struggle is the conflict between individual and corporate definitions of the individual as worker and the culture's deep commitment to ideals of personal sovereignty. Meanwhile, two of education's primary functions--promoting full individual development and producing workers--are increasingly seen as contradictory. Education has responded to, not directed, changes in the nature and meaning of work; it has served, not defined, society's needs. Dominant sections of society seem unready to change that situation or to modify assumptions about profit and efficiency. Yet, some observers hold schools somewhat responsible for current unrest. Schools have influenced the direction of values change, e.g., in promoting self actualization that feeds the new anti-authoritarianism. There is room for debate here, and need to realize that preparing people for work is not merely a matter of marketable skills and aptitudes and "matching." The first step is to ask if conceptions about work underlying current educational practice are in tune with modern realities. (CP)

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THE WORK ETHIC AND AMERICAN SCHOOLS:

THE ROOTS OF CHANGE

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EDUCATION & WELFARE
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EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout most of this century, America has understood work to be an economic, not a social problem. Whether workers liked their jobs or not, felt dehumanized or unfulfilled, whether the workplace colored one's family life or political views—these were not questions of pressing concern to society. Not that social dilemmas were less real. The struggle for workers' rights has dominated much of the history of our era. Discontent with routine, overcontrolled, and intrinsically unrewarding tasks is as old as the Industrial Revolution. So is the care with which our public institutions have kept watch over proper work habits and attitudes. And since the 1920s an entire discipline in social science has devoted its energies to the problem of worker morale and production. But the frustrations and aspirations of worklife have been perceived and treated almost exclusively in hard economic terms.

In recent years, however, the quality of working life has moved from "a hobby horse of the tender-minded" to a major topic of public discussion. Work has begun to assume the dimensions of a social problem, one discussed in the same imperative terms as the break-up of the American family, civil rights, the displacement of the aged. Indeed, there is a new awareness of the extent to which these and other interrelated issues impinge on the workplace, and how the nature of a person's work "affects his social character and personality, the manner in which he participates or fails to participate as a citizen in the larger community, and his overall sense of worth and dignity."¹ While such empirical evidence as we have does not support claims of a dramatic decline in job satisfaction, questions of the meaning of work and the individual's relationship to society continue to move to center stage. Many see worklife at the center of vast cultural changes that are now facing American society with a crises of values.

A lot is being written about the "radical transformation" or erosion of the work ethic. While journalists conjecture a new "anti-work ethic,"

a "new, deep-seated rejection by the young of the traditional American faith in hard work,"² surveys report that the commitment to work is as strong as ever, but that workers are challenging assumptions underlying work's institutions, such as their anachronistic authoritarianism. There is a prevailing sense that old definitions of work are dead or dying and new ones are yet to be born. "The traditional ideologies used to explain the place of jobs and employment no longer command belief," writes Thomas Green.³ Some social scientists speak of the need to restore a "relevant" work ethic, to find and articulate a set of values appropriate to the new post-industrial epoch. Others see them already evolving. Despite the uncertainty, the primitive methods of measuring job satisfaction and the fruitless debate over its decline, there is significant agreement about the fundamental nature and direction of cultural change. Most readings of current trends, from those reported in HEW's *Work in America* to the "New Breed" values surveyed by public opinion expert, Daniel Yankelovich, emphasize the same basic shifts, which can be briefly sketched as follows:

- o *Changing definitions of success.* The values of competition, status-seeking, and material consumption are giving way to the theme of gratification and the growing importance of leisure. New ideas of success revolve around the vague concept of self-fulfillment, with increasing emphasis—especially among college youth—on work that is challenging and "meaningful." This shift from achievement to self-actualization is usually defined in opposition to the concern with economic security. It's not that money is becoming unimportant, says Yankelovich, but that "an increasing number of people are coming to feel that there is such a thing as enough money. And this is new."⁴ Work is no longer to be the inflexible core around which the other parts of life must bend. Young parents are less willing to postpone gratification for the sake of their children's future or to live vicariously in their children's success.
- o *The quest for personal autonomy.* A new "rights consciousness" and a greater preoccupation with self modifies the character of the bonds which tie the individual to social institutions. Employers can no longer assume the automatic and "unearned" loyalty of the individual. In its stead is a growing concern for individual rights and power in the workplace.

o *A challenge to the cult of efficiency.* People are increasingly unwilling to subordinate personality to the regimentation of the workplace, or to be viewed as an interchangeable part in the megamachine. They want more attention to the emotional aspects of organizational life. This questioning of the values of efficiency has begun to reach beyond the confines of the counterculture. The new spirit is "anti-bureaucratic and suspicious of all hierarchy."

There is naturally disagreement about the magnitude and extent of these changes and about how to interpret them. Different people point to the same trends as signs that American society is going down the drain and that it is arriving at the higher reaches of liberation. But whether or not growing evidence of changing cultural values can legitimately be termed a crisis, it increasingly raises questions about the school's role in helping young people form personal values and attitudes related to work. Should the schools try to instill a work ethic or leave it to the family and industry? Although industrialists today are less sure of what they want education to do than they were a century ago, most would still support the notion that "proper work attitudes" should be taught. But which ethic, now that there is more than one? Attitudes proper from whose perspective—business organizations or the individual whose full human potential education is committed to develop?

Understandably, in the last few decades schools have shied away from the traditional concern with values inculcation. The tendency has been to relegate the whole question of meaning to that boggy "affective domain." Human values are too subjective, their development too complex and elusive. One of the reasons work poses an "educational" problem is the unprecedented extent to which an individual's values need to be "tested" and "clarified" and "chosen." As Philip Slater says:

Perhaps the major problem for Americans is that of choice: Americans are forced into making more choices per day, with fewer "givens," more ambiguous criteria, less environmental stability, and less social structural support, than any people in history.⁵

It is commonly believed that in this militantly pluralistic society—with its smorgasbord of ideological options and the potent competition schools

receive as socializing agents from the "youth culture" and popular media — the best that can be done is to "let the young person choose his own ethical system with a little help from the schools on how to choose wisely."⁶ Even if this proves to be so, a "little help" will entail more than most teachers are now able to provide. After a full decade of experience in trying to narrow the much publicized gap between school and work, practitioners in career education programs have found it extremely difficult to help young people develop an understanding of the world of work — its requirements, rewards, shortcomings — without helping them think through questions of meaning, values, expectations, attitudes, and that such efforts need to be better informed. Educators who advocate teaching about work as a major part of the social studies curriculum, like government, complain that at present "no established model or fully accepted theory exists" concerning the development of conceptions about work,⁷ and that they lack interesting, academically sound materials for teaching about work-related issues. A recent examination of the materials currently available found that most treat work in dated and superficial terms.⁸ The need is increasingly felt and expressed for "more realistic" approaches to helping young people "understand more clearly, more realistically, the role of work in their lives." In affirming the foundations of a work-oriented society, many claim, education cannot continue merely to accept the current economic system as just and seek to adapt the young to it; rather, schools must give young people the kind of critical perspective that will enable them to make sense out of that system and its institutions as they change.

In thinking about these questions, some historical perspective is critical, especially when hyperbole is on the tip of everyone's tongue in describing "future shock," and "continuous irreversible change proceeding at an ever accelerating pace," and the need to train children for an unknown future. There is the tendency these days to talk as though the work ethic had remained static from Ben Franklin's or Horatio Alger's day to the Lordstown strike, and to forget that American schools have been teaching about work for two hundred years, and what they taught and how

they taught it have changed significantly with shifts in social and economic reality.

The forces now shaping the meaning of work in America did not suddenly spring into being with the social upheavals of the sixties or the New Deal and the origins of the "welfare state," although these and other recent events are obviously crucial parts of it. Rather, the "current transformation of the work ethic" is the result of a lengthy history, another chapter in the industrialization of American life, that great shift from rural and agrarian to urban and industrial society that has marked the last hundred years of our history. The well-established and deep-rooted values that preceded the emergence of the urban-industrial culture were displaced, but not destroyed. The subsequent history of the interpretations of work's meaning in this country has reflected the tension between resistance and adaptation to the forces of industrialism. But more particularly, it reflects changes in our concept of the individual, for what we mean by the work ethic is much more than a set of "work values"; it has always served as the quintessential definition of the American citizen—a far more telling definition than the political one—and as the meaning of work changes, so does the functional notion of what an individual is and the kind of relation he has to society.

The intention of this paper, then, is to place the contemporary dialogue on work within an historical perspective. For one indispensable means of better understanding where we are headed (or seem to be) is to look closely at where we've been. In the following pages, as we examine the evolving meaning of work in America—how dominant views have changed over time and why, and what role schools have played in serving or shaping that change—we will naturally focus on problems. The aim here is not to argue their pervasiveness, nor to underwrite an alarmist view of current dilemmas. We do not yet know as a society whether most workers are happy or unhappy in their jobs, and it is not at all clear that the joys of work are defunct. Rather the hope is that by reminding ourselves how those dilemmas came to be, we can see more clearly what they are.

THE MYTHS OF NATION-BUILDING

The work ethic seen eroding in the 1970s reaches directly back, across more than a century of change, to a society whose characteristic temperament, economic circumstance, and ideological heritage had converged to create "an unquailed commitment to the moral primacy of work."⁹ This commitment was, from the beginning, something unique, something Tocqueville and other European travelers found remarkable. It was a creed of exertion, of seizing hold of life and making it yield, of using and bettering it. What distinguished man as the "paragon of animals" was the urge to be up and doing, to push against and master whatever resists it in the natural world. Work, not warfare, religion, or art, was the crucible in which human virtues were forged in pre-industrial America. "A man has within him" said William Ellery Channing, "capacities of growth which deserve and will reward intense, unrelaxing toil." Nor are we speaking of a creed of drudgery. In its original setting it managed an easy fusion of the ideal and practical in a view of life that saw patient toil as a sure way to improve a man's spirit as well as his purse, a way to cultivate good character as well as a good field of crops.

This outlook has reached our corporate state in such an attenuated form that some have wondered skeptically if underneath all the lofty rhetoric such a view ever really existed. Indeed, as actually experienced, the work ethic in this country has always been hard to pin down, partly because it has been wrapped in shrouds of piety, but also because it was from the outset a union of disparate and even contradictory elements, an amalgam always in flux. But it did exist, and its influence on the nation's life has been incalculable. The social and economic course this country has followed is hardly conceivable without it.

Work ethic is a worn, simplistic phrase; while aptly distilling the "moral primacy," it distills too much, and like most labels has proved narrowly misleading. But it has become engraved on our thinking and is used here as a shorthand expression for what Daniel Rodgers calls the "strands of ideas

that came together to affirm work as the core of the moral life." In seeking to understand how the long evolution of the work ethic has affected our present society, the first step is to get some sense of what these "strands of ideas" were and how they held together.

Protestant Origins

As E.P. Thompson puts it, "Weber and Tawney have so thoroughly anatomized the interpenetration of the capitalist mode of production and the Puritan ethic," that there hasn't been much left for others to do but quibble over which came first. For our purposes it is enough to note that Luther and the Protestant Reformation had reclaimed the idea of vocation from religious elitism, secularized it, and gave it back to the ordinary man as a revitalized gospel of work. What had been the supreme vocation, a cloistered life of contemplation and prayer, was after the Reformation seen as an egoistic evasion of one's obligation to society. "True Godliness," scorned William Penn, "don't turn men out of the world" into "a lazy, rusty, unprofitable self-denial." The old doctrine of a calling was domesticated and universally broadened to include the humblest forms of toil. Any and all work was a calling, a station, and performing it as faithfully and diligently as one could was a way of serving both God and the common good.

Long before the Industrial Revolution in England, Puritanism had managed to make work a condition for salvation. But if Weber exaggerated this creed's brooding aversion to joy (he would doubtless have agreed with Mencken's definition of Puritanism as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy"), he correctly stressed the moral "methodicalness" the Puritans and Quakers brought to the new world, a kind of ethical bookkeeping, vigilant against the misspence of time and eager to record the passing moments, each of which must be accounted for in Heaven's reckoning, in the column of moral profit. "This was an asceticism of a novel sort," observes Daniel Rodgers, "worldly and systematic, looking forward to the time-and-profit calculus of industrial life" rather than backward to the flagellations of the monk's cell. Almost from the moment this ethic reached colonial soil, it began to take on its distinctively American character.

When Max Weber wanted to find the spirit of pre-industrial capitalism set down "in almost classical purity," he went to the writings of Benjamin Franklin. With his knack for aphorism and homely anecdote, Franklin more than anyone gave the traditional virtues of industry, sobriety, diligence, perseverance, thrift, honesty, and prudence their American stamp. His *Autobiography* and the sayings of Poor Richard gathered into *The Way to Wealth* showed a Yankee moral utility nudging God aside in the equation of virtue and work. His "early bird," nose-to-the-grindstone maxims shaped popular thought well into the nineteenth century (Mark Twain said a boy couldn't follow a single natural instinct without tumbling over some of them) and did much to convince the average American that both prosperity and good living were found in a prudent vigor. For his personal use, Franklin says, he had formulated this work ethic into thirteen serviceable virtues, but in the gist of his injunctions and in the public mind they tended to boil down to two, industry and frugality. We will take a closer look at frugality later in light of the creation of twentieth-century consumerism. But here, in its traditional context of scarcity, it is the natal twin of diligence. In the pre-industrial economy, neither value has much meaning or effect without the other. From the pulpit, primer, and political hustings generations were urged, in Sam Johnson's words, "to work hard and live sparingly."

In Franklin's Anglo-America, long before the industrial revolution had abstracted work into a process of wage earning, the value of constant enterprise transcended immediate need or specific purpose. "Lose no time," Franklin urged. "Be always employed in something useful. Cut off all unnecessary actions." His emphasis is not on the energetic pursuit of a particular calling, but on the thrifty management of energy. According to Reverend G.W. Bethune, in the "nice sense of the term, we have no leisure, for the truly virtuous and faithful will find occupation for every moment." The American creed of industry became in effect an intense faith in activity for its own sake. This is certainly how European visitors saw it. From Tocqueville to Lord Bryce, foreign observers were struck first and last by what one called this "incessant busyness." The impressions of the Viennese immigrant Francis Grund were typical. After spending ten years in this country, he said that it seemed "as if all America were but one gigantic workshop." He found that "active occupation" was not only the chief source

of happiness for Americans, "but they are absolutely wretched without it, and instead of the '*dolce far niente*,' know but the horrors of idleness. Business is the very soul of an American." This preoccupation with bustle and striving was boosted with increasing elaboration by lay moralists. Labor was praised without stint as "the law of man's nature," as "a privilege, a glory, and a delight." Surely there was work in heaven, enthused poet Lucy Larcom, "since work is the best thing on earth we know," and preachers insisted that "The sweat-drops on the brow of honest toil are more precious than the jewels of a ducal coronet."¹⁰ Its opposite was treated with equal extravagance. Henry Ward Beecher pictured the indolent mind as "full of vermin," and Thomas Shephard admonished his son at Harvard to "abhor one hour of idleness as you would be ashamed of one hour of drunkenness." But as it burgeoned in America, the work ethic amounted to a good deal more than a zeal for enterprise and a fear of idleness. If the qualities Franklin extolled were psychologically of a piece, "cohered as a meaningful syndrome,"¹¹ it is because they expressed an entire culture's frame of mind at a particular moment in time, in a particular social setting.

Industry and Diligence

On the eve of the Industrial Revolution in America, at least eighty percent of the population lived in rural territory, four-fifths were self-employed, and more than half of the labor force was still engaged in agriculture. This combination of farmers, craft artisans, and merchants molded the work ethic modern society is still contending with, and remained the moral norm in the national mind's eye long after it had in fact vanished.

As Daniel Rodgers points out, the work ethic rested on a set of premises about everyday life that made sense. One of these was the conviction that a man made his own luck. The American dream rejected from the outset the Old World aristocratic notion that men could claim superiority by virtue of rank and birth alone. It embraced instead the ideal of the "newly sovereign individual" as the source of his own achievement. Despite the realities of class and hierarchy that defined the social matrix within which men were expected to diligently strive, the egalitarian attitudes bred by a

century of living on the edge of a boundless frontier did in fact foster the belief that leadership had to justify itself through superior capability and moral worth. It is this fundamental, unshakable notion that a man was not given an identity at birth but had to create one for himself that fuels the individualism and self-reliance which observers like Tocqueville considered the most distinctive expressions of the American character: "They owe nothing to any man; they expect nothing from any man. They acquire the habit of always considering themselves alone." The Americans are "apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands." This heady notion of destiny-shaping was founded on some firm economic realities.

The puritan ethic of industry had been incorporated early in the application of the natural-rights philosophy to land tenure. "It is both wise and just to leave the distribution of property to industry and talents," said John Taylor. This early version of laissez-faire was rooted in religious doctrines of self-help, and if it was commonly used by colonial landowners to justify the status quo and later by Social Darwinians to keep unpropertied workers in a "contented inferiority," in the beginning it drew much of its potency from what seemed sheer plausibility. In the expansive mood of a rapidly growing economy where land and resources were abundant and labor scarce, it was easy to believe that almost anyone willing to work and save diligently could improve his lot. As Crèvecoeur had euphorically put it, "We are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained because each person works for himself." In such a world the paths of steady ascent were well marked. After all, the man most responsible for advertising the fruits of diligence, Benjamin Franklin, had by practicing it in fact risen from humble origins to stand before kings. Both he and Jefferson attributed the rapid growth of the colonies to high wages resulting from the abundance of cheap land for farmers and ample customers for artisans. So long as vast stretches of vacant land lay open in the West, this "safety valve" would prevent an underpaid population of rootless laborers from massing in towns. Any man willing to work could find some piece of ground in America and, with prudence and industry, become an independent and responsible citizen. If, as Bernard Bailyn says, "material independence was sooner or later available to every energetic white male," its corollary was also easy to believe: if a man failed, it was his own fault.

This extraordinary sense of self-determination shaped the distinctive ethic of pre-industrial capitalism in artisans' shops, mercantilist manufacturers, counting houses, and the marts of small tradesmen. But its epitome in the national mind was the farm. Almost every aspect of pre-industrial society has been hopelessly glamorized by generations looking backwards out of a deep sense of loss, and none more so than its agrarian character. Even in the mid-nineteenth century the American mind was being nurtured on nostalgic notions about rural living which Richard Hofstadter calls the agrarian myth. 1890 was the year in which the U.S. Census officially declared the frontier "closed," and was also the last year that more than half of all Americans lived on farms. By the 1920s and 1930s, as the compartmentalized anonymity of life in "megalopolis" had clearly overtaken the reality of rural community, the harmony of pre-industrial society began to look more and more like Eden. In 1934 Louis Mumford contrasted modern industrial society with a sort of prelapsarian

village culture . . . where work, even hard work, is rarely divorced from rhythm, song, human companionship, and esthetic delight: where vital activity is counted as great a reward of labor as the product: where neither power nor profit takes precedence over life: where the family and the neighbor and the friend are all part of a visible, tangible, face-to-face community Every member of the community had access to the entire cultural heritage, and could ordinarily master every part of it . . . work and play, religion and education were united.¹²

But if agrarian America was from the beginning mythologized by Jefferson, Crevecoeur, Freneau and others, the myth so effectively "embodied men's values," says Hofstadter, "that it profoundly influenced their way of perceiving reality and hence their behavior." However misty the antecedents of this myth, its effect on the national destiny was profound. Many of the most enduring features of the American character, and the values and beliefs that form the core of its faith in work, are rooted in this rural and primarily agrarian world.

As the representative citizen of the eighteenth century, the farmer was the apotheosis of American self-sufficiency. It was this small landed proprietor Jefferson had pinned his hopes on in his dream of "a nation of farmers,

tilling their own soil, independent, informed, unexcitable, and incorruptible."¹³ A prudent and industrious farmer could hope to enjoy, as Henry Parkes says, "an economic independence of a kind difficult for twentieth-century man to even visualize." Working primarily for subsistence, not for market, the colonial farmer produced his own food, clothing, tools, and utensils. His success was in fact to a remarkable extent determined by qualities his society held in moral esteem: strength of will, perseverance, self-denial, and honesty. The agricultural household was the main unit of production, whether of food or handicrafts. What it could not supply, neighbors, local merchants and craftsmen usually did. "Each community was a self-sufficing world," observes Lincoln's biographer, J.G. Randall. In a virtually unbroken circle of communal interdependence, the village and farming countryside produced nearly everything that was eaten, woven, or otherwise consumed. The imperviousness of this self-sufficiency to cash wages is evident in the laconic entry of a New England farmer in his diary:

My farm gave me and my whole family a good living on the produce of it and left me, one year with another, one hundred and fifty silver dollars, for I never spent more than ten dollars a year, which was for salt, nails and the like. Nothing to eat, drink or wear was bought, as my farm produced it all.¹⁴

In such a world, production and consumption were obviously not the discrete, institutionally managed processes they are today. If some historians have exaggerated the benefits of a "group of extended kinship gathered into a single household," the self-sustaining character of pre-industrial society nevertheless depended on the fact that the entire family was enlisted in the process of production. Each member participated as a "fellow worker" interdependently with every other member. This was true not just of agricultural life but also of such home industries as cottage weaving, where the whole family was a single economic unit, with the youngest children winding bobbins, the older ones watching for flaws or helping throw the shuttle, and adolescents and parents working the looms.

The pre-industrial spirit of community solidarity grew out of the fact that, in a literal way lost to us, people depended on one another. It was customary for everyone to pitch in with tasks like barn raising, harvesting,

cornhusking, and serve as volunteers to repair roads and put out fires. But people also ordinarily helped each other during sickness, calamities, birth and death, and even marital problems. During such times a person did not seek help from impersonal and professional agencies, he went to his neighbors. Such dependence on others, because it was mutual and therefore not enfeebling, in fact helped sustain the vigorous individualism of the community. This functional primacy of the family and community, the extent to which they together comprised the totality of social existence in a primarily agricultural and artisan economy, cannot be overstressed. On it depends that fragile harmony between economic and moral standards that gave the work ethic its original potency and that promoted the American qualities of optimism and self-assurance. It is greatly responsible for the extent to which ideals of independence and opportunity "centered on the truth of individual effort."

The Role of Education

Early nineteenth-century schooling unabashedly placed a higher premium on developing a child's moral character than on tutoring his mind. The catalogue of an Iowa Territory school declared in 1843 that "education consists in the amount of manhood, spiritual as well as intellectual, which is developed, and not in the abundance of facts with which the mind is gorged." It was the era of the "District school," the proverbial little red schoolhouse which, long after the urban centralization of education, could still be found in rural and small-town America during the twentieth century.

Although what Laurence Cremin called the "absolute centrality of the household in all childhood education" had loosened some since the eighteenth century, the family was still the most important agency in the transfer of culture and occupational skills, and the school was viewed by most as a small and even incidental part of life. It hammered out some rudiments in the three R's, taught a modicum of random facts about geography and history, but its main purpose was to train character and socialize children in the lore of local—and not national—life. Indeed the lively hectoring most schoolmasters received as "outsiders" (like that caricatured in *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*) was an expression of aggressive provinciality, an assertion

of the belief that homegrown standards and style were superior to those of the larger world. In the agrarian mind, the state tended to be not just an abstraction, but an alien one.

Yet this very insularity gave the textbook a peculiar importance. For modern Americans, overloaded with information and overburdened with media, it may be difficult to appreciate the impact schoolbooks had in the nineteenth century. In the first place, teachers were relatively untrained and tended to rely almost entirely on the texts at hand. Learning itself was defined as rote and letter-perfect memorization of what was in them. And this meant memorizing sentiment or value judgment quite as often as fact. Since schoolbooks, like clothing, were handed down from parent to child and from older to younger child to save money, and since the most common method of composing books was compilation and plagiarism from those previously published, pupils encountered an extraordinarily uniform content. Thus while the social experience of one-room schools reinforced localism, the textbooks used in them fostered a moral universality. This is true of Spellers, Arithmetics, Geographies, and Histories, but especially of the ubiquitous Readers. And by far the most popular were those compiled by the McGuffeys. Said to have shaped the minds of many generations of Americans, the six *McGuffey Eclectic Readers* dominated the schoolbook market for over seventy-five years. Like all other Readers, their selections of prose and poetry, narrative and description were intended to inculcate virtue while imparting information or improving skill. But however "artlessly moralistic, heavily didactic" and idealized modern readers may find the simple system of vice and virtue they taught, it was not the bland antiseptic world of Dick and Jane or Puff and Spot. Ruth Elson, who examined about a thousand of these nineteenth-century texts, found that

However glossed with sentiment, death and disease are a natural part of the world of the schoolbook. Reality is portrayed not so much through the postman, fireman, . . . but through the deeper reality of hardship, tragedy, passionate devotion to a cause, the satisfactions in overcoming obstacles.¹⁵

As Henry Steele Commager puts it, "What is striking about the Readers was that they made so few concessions to immaturity." There was "no drawing back

from many of the harsher experiences of the grown-up world." And the adult experience least shirked was put forth with didactic ardor:

Work, work, my boy, be not afraid;
Look labor boldly in the face.
Take up the hammer or the spade,
And blush not for your humble place.¹⁶

All the tenets of the work ethic we've been looking at—from frugality to faith in self-reliance—are sharply mirrored in the schoolbooks, but the most pervasive and insistent theme is the virtue of honest industry and the unqualified evil of sloth. Through thousands of anecdotes—in such stories as "Industry a Treasure," "Hugh Idle and Mr. Toil," "No Excellence Without Labor"—young readers learned that honesty and diligence are undeviatingly rewarded (usually immediately, always materially) and they were given graphic reason to heed Poor Richard's warning that "Trouble springs from idleness, and grievous toil from needless ease." The "Idle Schoolboy," for instance, is ruthlessly pilloried as a drone all through his school days because of the comical mistakes his "snail-like" listlessness habitually traps him into making, and he ends his dawdling days begging for bread in the streets. Likewise, "Lazy Ned" died a dunce because "He would never take the pains/ To seek the prize that labor gains." The "idle and worthless truant" was pictured "in the garments of slovenliness. In his step is the heaviness of stupid sloth." In two companion pieces, "Consequences of Idleness" and "Advantages of Industry," George Jones, whose laggard and loafing ways dissipate him into "a poor wanderer, without money and without friends," is contrasted with diligent and earnest Charles Bullard who, because "hard study gave him a relish for play, and play again gave him a relish for hard study," becomes "useful and happy and universally respected." The meaning of the paired tales is scarcely a matter for speculation:

If you are not diligent in the improvement of your time,
it is one of the surest evidences that your heart is not
right with God. You are placed in this world to improve
your time. In youth you must be preparing for future
usefulness. And if you do not improve the advantages
you enjoy, you sin against your Maker.¹⁷

In an 1852 reader Henry Ward Beecher explained, "I never knew an early-rising, hard-working, prudent man, careful of his earnings, and strictly honest, who complained of bad luck." But it was not just Fortune who sided with the diligent and self-denying, it was Nature herself. "The most fundamental assumption in nineteenth-century schoolbooks," says Ruth Elson, "is the moral character of the universe." Isaac Watt's "How doth the little busy bee/ Improve each shining hour" and similar lessons from beavers were tirelessly repeated, and whether or not a child later chose to exercise his "fundamental right to labor in the earth," his morality was grounded in a rural universe. He learned that the entire natural world was governed by the same principles of industry and prudence he was urged to practice. When ants stored up food it was depicted as an act of moral responsibility rather than as instinctive behavior. Conversely, the grasshopper's hunger in winter was a richly deserved punishment for his foolish failure to prepare for lean times.

In 1800 Jefferson had written to his friend Benjamin Rush, "I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health, and the liberties of man." This view is resolutely affirmed, defended, and illustrated in schoolbooks throughout the nineteenth century. The readers and histories laud the farmer and his health-giving life "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife" and contrast simple country virtues with the artificial and sordid world of the city, "where wealth accumulates and men decay." Unlike the corrupt trader who "has no country" because his only nationality is money-grubbing, the farmer's natural loyalty to the land he cultivates makes him the "backbone of a free government." But the inherent stability of rustic life also nourishes that intangible strength of character so deeply bound to the American faith in work. As a McGuffey text put it in 1860:

The man who stands upon his own soil, who feels that he is the rightful owner of the land which he tills, feels more strongly than another the character of a man.¹⁸

In the early part of the century the schoolbooks assume that the American is a farmer and perpetuate the idea that the nation's independence, prosperity, and happiness depend directly on its rural condition. The notion

of a career, as it reached country youth before the Civil War, did not yet exalt businessmen. As Richard Hofstadter says, "farm boys were encouraged to emulate inventors, scientists, writers, philosophers, and military figures," (all of which of course pointed to city life). But in the second half of the century, after industrialization had gathered momentum, the successful individuals offered as models are commonly bankers or merchants, and the farm is viewed more and more nostalgically as a redemptive ideal or as a brake that may yet stem the migration of young men to the cities. "The more commercial this society became," observes Hofstadter, "the more reason it found to cling in imagination to the noncommercial agrarian values,"¹⁹ which will persist as a diminishing underside of the expanding industrial culture. Ironically, this agrarian strand of the work ethic helps produce the Rockefellers and Fords, and long after their corporations and assembly lines turn it into fiction, the rural character of American life will remain as an ideal against which to measure the anonymity, institutional dependence, industrial anomie, and prodigal consumerism of modern life. It will define and indict the urban decadence of the Roaring Twenties and flare like a dying star in the Depression Thirties.

Thus, although the work values promulgated in the schoolbooks provide an "uninterrupted continuum" throughout the nineteenth century, a profound shift occurs in the society and, as we shall see, in school practice. The same set of values that in the early part of the century guided the lives of artisans, shopkeepers, and petty capitalists, by mid-century was producing the great robber barons. Many of the early captains of industry (as Henry Ford, for one, often testified) forged their empires in part by the strong-willed, thrifty perseverance they had encountered in their McGuffeys. Henry Steele Commager reminds us that "The generation most elaborately and persistently exposed to the morality of the Readers—the generation roughly from the forties to the eighties—was perhaps the most materialistic generation in our history."²⁰

Summary

The pre-industrial American work ethic was a constellation of ideas and beliefs, a *Zeitgeist*, that at its best tempered an ardent faith in the pursuit of economic gain with ideals of prudence, honesty, and a keen sense of obligation toward others, of public usefulness. Its social vitality depended on this remarkable fusion of moral and economic values, what Henry Parkes calls a clear correlation "between material success and those qualities Americans had been taught to regard as virtuous." It was a precarious balance, for as we shall see, once cut loose from its ethical moorings, this restless "busyness" easily becomes the unbridled self-interest of the nabobs and the ruthless drive of the Sammy Glicks. What held the fusion so long was the context we have just sketched: the unique spirit of individuality rooted in a national conviction that economic freedom was in fact attainable, supported by a strong sense of family potency and of cohesive community. The core faith in work will survive, but in altered and attenuated forms, as its original context cracks under the impact of radical change and eventually disintegrates altogether. What starts the changes is, of course, the industrial revolution.

THE AGE OF INDUSTRY

What we call the industrialization of America obviously means much more than the conversion from artisan workshop to large-scale factory production. Industrialization also stands for the massive cities that mushroom with it, the great population shift from rural to urban living, and the steady growth of institutional and bureaucratic controls over individual life. It means the creation of a drastically different orientation to life and work, production and consumption, from that which held sway under Jefferson's agrarian ideal, and a completely new cultural ideology as well. But first and foremost it means a transformation in the nature of work itself.

Because of the far-reaching disruption it caused, and the sense of displacement experienced by workers, there is an irresistible tendency to imagine this transformation as some sort of alien onslaught. Historians often speak of the factory system "invading" the agrarian and shop economy. It is easy to forget that the frame of mind that industrialized America was firmly established in the eighteenth century. The factories that appeared in fields during the 1830s and 1840s were the culmination of the restless urge to improvement so sedulously inculcated by moralists and schoolbooks that had long equated moral virtue with pecuniary gain; the awesomely efficient industrial machines built by Rockefeller and Ford were but the logical outgrowth of Ben Franklin's endless tinkering. While few anticipated its results, the factory was the outcome of these attitudes, held not just by the Northern merchant class and mercantilist manufacturers but also by the enterprising farmer who by the early nineteenth century was filling in the slack periods of farming by taking materials put out to him by wholesale merchants and turning them into such products as boots and shoe uppers, woven cloth goods, and straw hats.

The Division of Labor and Man

As observers from Marx to Braverman have pointed out, the salient characteristic of the industrial organization of work is not the general *social* division of labor common to all societies, but the division of labor *in detail* which is the special invention of industrial capitalism. Not only is a task broken down into its component parts, but each part is assigned to a different worker. The classic description of this new mode of production was given by Adam Smith in his famous example of pin-making:

One man draws out the wire, another straightens it, a third cuts it, a fourth points it, a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head; to make the head requires two or three distinct operations; to put it on, is a peculiar business, to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade by itself to put them into the paper; and the important business of making a pin is, in this manner, divided into about eighteen distinct operations, which, in some manufactories, are all performed by distinct hands, though in others the same man will sometimes perform two or three of them.²¹

Thus, concludes Harry Braverman, "while the social division of labor subdivides *society*, the detailed division of labor subdivides *humans*." Its critical effect is that it separates conception from execution—what Samuel Haber called "the radical separation of thinking from doing." In 1859, hardly a decade after the sewing machine came into use, "a Cincinnati clothing factory had succeeded in dividing the making of a pair of men's pants, formerly the job of a single tailor, into seventeen different occupations."²² The process was inexorable, as trade after trade became industrialized. According to Daniel Rodgers, "By the 1870s, the shoemaking cottages were empty, and the men who had once been shoemakers now found themselves factory operators: beaters, binders, bottomers, buffers, burnishers, channellers, crimpers, cutters, dressers, edge setters and so on through some thirty or forty subdivided occupations."²³

While many were dazzled by the astounding increase in production and the abundance augured by the new machines, power sources, and organization of work, others viewed from the outset this fragmentation of the work process

as a social disaster. Tocqueville observed that while the new manufactory worker becomes every day more adroit in the fabrication of one thing, "at the same time he loses the general faculty of applying his mind to the direction of his work," so that "in proportion as the workman improves, the man is degraded." John Ruskin insisted in his *Stones of Venice* that the much-perfected division of labor was given a false name:

It is not, truly speaking, the labor that is divided, but the men: —divided into mere segments of men — broken into small fragments and crumbs of life so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail.²⁴

Marx has analyzed the historic process by which capitalistic management first appropriates the all-around skills of the craftsman, then establishes systematic control over the design, structure, and content of the work process, transforming labor power into a commodity "no longer organized according to the needs and desires of those who sell it." Its effect on what Stuart Ewen calls the "subjective experiences of traditional culture," the social rhythms and perceptions of pre-industrial life, was experienced "as a historic shock met with resistance and antagonism." In proletarianizing the worker, industrialism uproots the entire family economy through "the steady displacement of home production by social production, with the *lore and custom* of production formalized and separated out of the home as planning and engineering."²⁵ This on-going process, through refinements in the application of scientific management, is still shaping attitudes toward work today. But the crux of its impact on pre-industrial culture lay in the "degradation" of the individual worker and in the social relations of production. As summarized by E.P. Thompson in his *Making of the English Working Class*,

The classic exploitive relationship of the Industrial Revolution is depersonalized, in the sense that no lingering obligations of mutuality—or paternalism or deference, or of the interests of "the Trade"—are admitted. There is no whisper of the "just" price, or of a wage justified in relation to social or moral sanctions, as opposed to the operation of

free market forces. Antagonism is accepted as intrinsic to the relations of production. Managerial or supervisory functions demand the repression of all attributes except those which further the expropriation of the maximum surplus value from labor.²⁶

Thompson notes that "in fact, no complex industrial enterprise could be conducted according to such a philosophy," that the need for industrial peace and smooth functioning modifies managerial techniques and even fosters the growth of new forms of paternalism. Nevertheless in the end, as Daniel Rodgers says, "the factory system challenged each of the certainties upon which the work ethic had rested and unsettled the easy equation of work and morality."²⁷ And the most immediately disturbing effect of this challenge was in the redefinition of the individual as worker.

Making Workers

As Dr. Andrew Ure explained in his *Philosophy of Manufactures*, published in 1835, the new industrialists faced the task of "training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automaton." Centuries of pre-industrial work life had been governed by circadian and seasonal rhythms, including many interruptions, short days, and holidays and often the "keeping of St. Monday." The social perceptions and self-paced work patterns of both the native-born artisan and immigrant peasant radically conflicted with the factory system's need for operatives to "follow a rigid daily and weekly schedule, work steadily at segmented tasks, follow orders strictly, and be smoothly-meshing interchangeable parts."²⁸ So drastic was the required metamorphosis that Ure considered it "nearly impossible to convert persons past the age of puberty . . . into useful factory hands" for they were unable "to conquer their listless or restive habits."

To assist in this formidable process of conversion, the factory managers and the new industrial business class appealed to the schools to help produce workers with the habits of punctuality, obedience, order, regularity, and industry required by the factory. The task of schooling now was to adapt people to the new incentives of the urban industrial system. This new

pressure towards industrial discipline permeated all forms of socialization. Even Sunday school teachers were instructed to tame the unsubdued passions of children and render them obedient, courteous, industrious, submissive, and orderly.

As David Rothman has recently demonstrated, the first half of the nineteenth century had witnessed the proliferation of rehabilitative and custodial institutions, such as the orphanage, alms house, reformatory, insane asylum, and penitentiary. The school now assumes a central role in this gradually accelerating process whereby specialized, impersonal, public agencies absorb functions formerly carried out by the household and community. As it embarks on its "new" custodial function, which will continue to expand with something approaching the inevitability of mitosis, the school system naturally gravitated in its development toward the factory model. A crude but popular version already existed. The Monitorial or Lancastrian system provided education on an assembly line basis. In a huge barn-like room holding 450 pupils and divided into twelve sections, each manned by a student monitor under the supervision of one master, the pupils would march from section to section receiving instruction in different subjects from the monitors. One French writer called it unsurprisingly "a manufactory of knowledge."

But if the schools took on the bureaucratic and regimented character of the industrial system in response to its needs, they did so at the same time in reaction to the havoc and disruption it was causing. The rapid progress of industrialization had drawn large numbers of people off the farms into factory towns, then cities, and transformed them from independent economic agents into jobholders. By the 1880s only one-third of the population was still self-employed. Once underway, the process of urbanization proceeded at a staggering pace. In the 1840s Chicago was a muddy village of less than 5,000. By 1860 it was a metropolis of over 109,000. (In 1870 one-fourth of the population lived in cities, by 1890 one-third, and by 1920 more than half.) This uprooting of rural communities, coupled with the tremendous influx of European immigrants, filled the cities with a large working class of bewildering and alarming heterogeneity, spawning crime, disorder, tenement slums, and boss rule. It created in the eyes of middle-class citizens a

"socially degraded and vicious population" and a growing fear of foreign "pollution." The stability of traditional communities had depended greatly on ties of deference, shared views and values, personal acquaintance, and what one European observer called "the wholesome restraint of public opinion." As these informal mechanisms of social control broke down, new formal ones were sought to replace them. It was now up to the schools to instill common values, create a new type of public stability, to "Americanize" the "undisciplined and uninstructed" children of immigrants and the new working class. To reformers like Horace Mann, the school offered the most humane means of social adjustment, of teaching "workers to work hard and accept their lot." William Bagley later put it in blunter terms. The function of the school, he wrote in his *Classroom Management*, was to "transform the child from a little savage into a creature of law and order."

Revisionist historians, seeking to explode what Colin Greer calls "the Great School Legend," the popular "myth" of American education as the beneficent promoter of an egalitarian society, have in recent years depicted the public school's evolution as an instrument serving the interests of the dominant business class and have stressed its role in perpetuating economic and social class differences. But whether one takes a conspiratorial view of the educational structure that evolved—as the deliberate efforts of a business-industrial elite to produce an alienated and stratified work force—or sees it instead in terms of the benevolent and humanitarian intentions of leading administrators like Mann and Barnard—making the best possible peace with historical forces of change—the nature and effects of the structure itself are not really in question. As Alvin Toffler summarizes it,

Mass education was the ingenious machine constructed by industrialism to produce the kind of adults it needed. The problem [was] how to pre-adapt children for a new world—a world of repetitive indoor toil, smoke, noise, machines, crowded living conditions, collective discipline, a world in which time was to be regulated not by the cycle of sun and moon, but by the factory whistle and clock. The solution was an educational system that, in its very structure, simulated this new world. The most criticized features of education today—the regimentation, lack of

individualization, rigid systems of seating, grouping, grading and marking, the authoritarian role of the teacher—are precisely those that made mass public education so effective an instrument of adaptation for its place and time.²⁹

Educational critics have recently focused attention on the "hidden curriculum" of schools, the fact that such behavioral traits as submission to authority, conformity to bureaucratic norms—while nowhere appearing in stated objectives or curriculum guides—are systematically inculcated and rewarded. But as David Tyack points out, most urban schoolmen of the late nineteenth century believed that "schools should inculcate obedience to bureaucratic norms overtly and with zest."³⁰ Superintendent of St. Louis schools Harris wrote in 1871: "The first requisite of the school is Order: each pupil must be taught first and foremost to conform his behavior to a general standard." In modern industrial society, he said, "conformity to the time of the train, to the starting of work in the manufactory," requires absolute precision and regularity. "The pupil must have his lessons ready at the appointed time, must rise at the tap of the bell, move to the line, and return . . . with equal precision."³¹ Academic failure was treated as evidence of moral laxity, and both corporal punishment and the "terror of degradation" were common responses to any breach of regimen. Factory inspector Helen Todd found that 412 of the 500 children she queried said they preferred the factory to school. One thirteen-year-old boy told her:

"They hits ye if yer don't learn, and they hits ye if ye whisper, and they hits ye if ye have string in yer pocket, and they hits ye if yer seat squeaks, and they hits ye if ye don't stan' up in time, and they hits ye if yer late, and they hits ye if ye ferget the page."³²

The industrial character of the urban school is hardly the revelation of modern critics. It was well understood, cogently described, and denounced by observers over a century ago. As early as 1844, Horace Mann had attacked the mechanical and coercive methods of the urban school. In their published reply, the thirty-one masters of the Boston Public Schools claimed, as Robert Church says, "that learning should be difficult because hard work in school built character. Having to apply himself to subjects that did not

interest him taught the student self-discipline and will power." Charles W. Eliot decried education's "military or mechanical methods," and Charles Francis Adams Jr. considered most school administrators mere "drill sergeants" and characterized the typical school as "a combination of the cotton mill and the railroad with the model State-prison." In 1892 Joseph Mayer Rice, after his controversial series on the schools for *The Forum*, began an investigative national tour of urban classrooms. What he reported was the regimented legacy of the factory school: an elaborate system of gradation, examinations, and rules for deportment designed to teach the pupil unquestioned obedience, regularity, and precision. One New York principal, asked if students were permitted to move their heads, retorted, "Why should they look behind when the teacher is in front of them?" A Chicago teacher putting her pupils through a "concert drill" punctuated their responses with: "Don't stop to think, tell me what you know!" Rice discovered the literal meaning of "toe the line." During recitation periods children were expected "to stand on the line, perfectly motionless, their bodies erect, their knees and feet together, the tips of their shoes touching the edge of a board in the floor."

This industrial model has of course persisted. Examining Middletown's education in 1924, the Lynds observed that "the school, like the factory, is a thoroughly regimented world. Immovable seats in orderly rows fix the sphere of activity of each child Bells divide the day into periods" in which "the lesson-textbook-recitation method is the chief characteristic."³³ And in the 1960s Edgar Friedenberg and others found the original model still intact. But what of its effect in the nineteenth century? It unquestionably helped create the new industrial working class. While many stubbornly resisted the discipline the factory managers imposed—a resistance that has never really ceased—the nation learned to conform to clock-time, wages, and to highly rationalized modes of social organization. When educators argued that the schooled worker made a better employee they meant, as David Tyack puts it, "that he was properly socialized to new modes of production, attuned to hierarchy, affective neutrality, role-specific demands, and extrinsic incentives for achievement."³⁴ But at the same time, the mechanical, isolated atmosphere of the learning, the punitive and competitive system of

rewards aimed at inculcating factory-oriented habits of industry, tended also to foster the "selfish individualism" that became the target of educational reformers from the 1890s on.

Old Faith and New Realities

As we noted earlier, the work ethic had always involved contradictions. It was a set of ideas held together by the magnetic force of circumstance, and not by logical consistency. From the outset the ideals of social usefulness and private gain often pulled in opposite directions, the former insisting unyieldingly on the "special dignity of those who soiled their hands with honest toil," while the latter invited everyone to get busy and better his lot, which in a capitalistic system soon meant "rising above" manual toil. Such ambivalences remained fairly benign in pre-industrial society, or were at least mitigated by the prevailing optimism.

Well into the nineteenth century, as John Cawelti says, the "conflicting strands of moralistic self-improvement and untrammelled enterprise run side by side in an uneasy and tenuous balance." But the complex of forces set in motion by the industrial revolution—the process of replacing the self-sufficient household with a "breadwinner" dependent on an employer and a "housewife" dependent on her husband, the skilled artisan with the alienated factory worker, and local autonomy with massive centralization—strain to the utmost then break apart the traditional synthesis of economic and moral values. From mid-nineteenth century on it became harder and harder to reconcile the old faith in the efficacy of work to the new realities of industrial culture. The rhetoric grows more hollow and unconvincing. That is why observers begin to speak of two different kinds of work ethics: the bourgeois ethic of frugality, investment and deferred gratification, which probably was internalized as an ideal by the aspiring middle class; and the so-called "industrial ethic" of obedience, conformity and docility which was preached with dubious success to the working class. Indeed, the reduction of the pre-modern ethos to this "employee" or wage-earner version has made modern observers skeptical about how much influence the work ethic ever exerted. "Among workmen," says Sebastian de Grazia, "the work ethic never existed."³⁵

Yet this ungluing of the earlier synthesis did not destroy the culture's inveterate faith in work, but rather altered it. The central tenets of the work ethic will persist long after its underpinnings have given way, but they persist as increasingly abstract ideals, more and more disembodied from the content and nature of work itself.

The assumptions about life hit hardest by the early shockwaves of industrial change were those underlying the traditional faith in diligent exertion, individual enterprise, and universal opportunity. As we have seen, the message drummed home generation after generation, by schoolbooks, stump rhetoric, editorials, and sermons, was that in this land of unprecedented opportunity, with plenty of room and an equal chance for all, anybody with a little gumption, energy, and perseverance could better his condition and achieve success. Even the poorest orphan boy, as young readers learned from Horatio Alger, could lift himself out of the streets with pluck and enterprise. Alger's celebration of upward mobility, in such books as *Striving Upward*, *Mark*, *the Matchboy*, and the *Ragged Dick* series, became a peculiarly potent version of the myth, in part because it reasserted the essentially rural values of a bygone era in the new metropolitan context. The typical Alger hero rose from city rags not to riches but to a secure white-collar position—as a promising clerk or junior partner in a firm—by exercising the "employee virtues" of hard work, dependability, honesty, and good manners.

On the other hand, to remain in poverty was a certain sign of moral turpitude and infirm character, the result of sloth, wastefulness, or ignorance. "Let us remember," said Russell Conwell in a famous lecture called *Acres of Diamonds*, "there is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings." In the late 1850s Lincoln's simple account of the myth still sounded convincing:

The prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him If any continue through life in the condition of the hired laborer, it is not the fault of the system, but because of either a dependent nature which prefers it, of improvidence, folly, or singular misfortune.³⁶

While Lincoln's is a remarkably humane rendition (in that it admits causes of poverty other than moral inadequacy) the bottom line remains the same: anyone who really wants to can make it in America. But later in the century, after the dust of giddy expansion stirred by the great money-makers had settled enough for the average man to see what had happened, it was clear that the path to success had radically narrowed, and the gulf between the newly rich and multiplying poor was widening. What Hofstadter calls "an entrepreneurial zeal probably without precedent in history, a rage for business, for profits," had created a business culture in which the old injunctions about opportunity and effort were becoming implausible or irrelevant.

In this new industrial state it was increasingly evident that for most people, no matter how industrious or prudent, the chances of significantly improving their economic lot were pretty slim. As John Cawelti observes, "Nobody could be more diligent than the steel-worker with his exhausting ten- or twelve-hour day or the farmer with his back-breaking round of labor from sunup to sundown. Yet, if the ordinary farmer or industrial worker managed to feed and clothe his family and achieve a minimal economic security, he could consider himself lucky."³⁷ On the other hand, those now profiting most from the industrial transformation obviously did not personify the traditional virtues of honest industry, frugality, and temperance. In the Gilded Age the old emphasis on diligently working one's way up was rapidly giving way to the "philosophy of grab." New explanations arose to justify the coexistence of progress and poverty. One explanation, Social Darwinism, sought to justify the abuses of the Robber Barons by giving a new twist to the old moralistic version of laissez-faire. The emergence of monopolies, the purchase of congressional votes, the spectacular rise of entrepreneurs, and economic empires carved out with "such cheerful and unstinting rapacity"³⁸ were rationalized not just in terms of the improvidence, laziness, and generally declining moral fibre of the masses, but also as the inevitable outcome of the struggle for existence. In this new dynamic, aggressively commercial society, in which individuals must compete for footholds on a dwindling number of ladder rungs, only the "fittest" could succeed and rise to the top. The incompetent and unworthy were naturally weeded out.

It is hard to tell how seriously most people took the reasoning of Herbert Spencer and his followers. There is certainly no reason to believe that the average factory hand, clerk, or housewife was greatly mollified by it. As the new commercial culture continued to transform labor into what even Channing decried as a "monotonous, stupefying round of unthinking toil," the growing cult of success began to jettison untenable ideas about the rewards of "character"—the older notion that success in business was ultimately a by-product of virtue—in favor of such qualities as drive, initiative, and opportunism. The declarations of industrial apologists that no form of labor could be degrading grew in shrillness in almost exact proportion to the excesses of "the Great Barbeque."

Carlyle might claim that every worker was a "small Poet." Emerson might write, "a man coins himself into his labor; turns his day, his strength, his thoughts, his affection into some product which remains a visible sign of his power." But the problem with such metaphysics was that in the emerging arena of industrial capitalism (as Marx and others were starting to point out) it was the "product" of labor that revealed the worker's impotence. A product he did not own, made only a fractional part of, and worked on with someone else's tools, according to motions and pace prespecified by "scientific" management; a product he was becoming less and less able to comprehend, much less take satisfaction from. The "traumatic" crux of the industrial redefinition of the individual (to which the fate of the work ethic is so intimately tied) was precisely the fact that a man could no longer "coin himself into" his labor.

By 1870 only one-third of the population was self-employed (by 1940 it would be one-fifth, and by 1970 one-tenth). Independent farmers, artisans, and shopkeepers were rapidly becoming jobholders and wage-earners. But the sense of independence that had always undergirded a faith in hard work refused to die; it became instead generalized and intangible. Self-sufficiency, no longer a practical reality, gradually became intellectualized as "individual rights" by vast institutional machinery nominally serving it. The idea that hard work builds character survived, but was not anchored in the context that gave it concrete immediacy. Its "truth" was more that of an intellectual

proposition. The pith of Teddy Roosevelt's credo, "nothing in this world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, and difficulty," might still be accepted, but only reluctantly, and with the same logic as the notion that if medicine tastes bad it must be good for you. But to say that such values became disconnected from the everyday experience of work itself is not to say their potency was extinguished. The emphasis on will power and grit, the irreducible value of standing on one's own feet and making one's own way, were too deeply ingrained in the national identity to disappear, even though the presence of the emerging corporate state argued against them.

THE SHIFT TO CORPORATE AMERICA

In his *Autobiography* Mark Twain explained why he had never taken much pride in being a good speller. "The ability to spell correctly is a talent, not an acquirement," he wrote. "There is some dignity about an acquirement, because it is a product of your own labor. It is wages earned."³⁹ In the new industrial age the traditional notion that effort itself, the act of striving, confers value on the thing gained—"something attempted, something done"—gradually shifts to the principle of earnings. If the modern industrial or white collar worker could not till his own soil, grow his food or make his clothes, if he could not define and set the rhythm of his tasks, he could at least earn all he ate, and "pay his own way." Less and less able to take pride in the "cunning hand" of his craft or to cultivate what Tawney called the "instinct for workmanship," the modern worker could still take satisfaction in giving an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, in spirit like the blacksmith he had read about in school:

His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

The vestigial ideal of self-reliance, now invested largely in the value of earning one's paycheck, remained a potent means of keeping one's sense of personal worth and integrity intact. It was reflected in the left-handed boast, "I've never missed a day," and was the reason that jobless men during the Depression were overwhelmed with guilt and shame at being unable to provide for their families, and why, as William Manchester says, "Newspapers of that period were crowded with accounts of men who took their lives rather than go on relief."⁴⁰

Thus the fundamentals of the work ethic endured into the modern age, but only after being transmuted. And this transformation, in the course of complex social change, became so radical (as certain prime values seemed to

capsize or turn upside down) that one logical response was to assume that the work ethic had vanished. This was an exaggeration, but it was nevertheless true that as a set of ideas, the original ethic had become stretched so far out of shape that only sophistry or wishful thinking could see it as having the same intellectual power as in the pre-industrial period. On the other hand, to think of the work ethic as being in terminal decline, or even as being replaced by something else, doesn't account for the tenacity with which its core attitudes and beliefs persisted, the ethical and psychological power they continued to exert on people's lives. This is why some modern observers, unperturbed by reports of a "values crisis," stress the work ethic's staying power by reminding alarmists that it has been "eroding" for over a hundred years. For while the country that emerged from World War I would eventually experience some polar shifts in values—from thrift to consumerism, from deferred to immediate gratification, from enterprise to self-fulfillment—these shifts were framed by the culture's deep-dyed commitment to work, and this commitment, even as it acquired new ideological garb, remained as constant as ever. ✓

Education and the New Corporate Person

"Utilization of the classroom for training industrial habits continued into the twentieth century," as Joel Spring says, but notions of what these habits were—what occupational traits and attitudes were needed in the new corporate state—began to undergo radical change. The connection between the needs of the workplace and the school's role in meeting them, a connection which had seemed so explicit in the nineteenth century, grew more oblique and problematic—which is one reason for the rise of the vocational education movement—and some features of progressive schooling that eventually would reshape the work ethic the most, nominally bore little relationship to work.

Even before the Progressive Era of reform was underway, intellectuals had become worried that the national character was being warped by what William James called America's worship of the bitch-goddess Success.

Reformers like Jane Addams were urging a new social consciousness to counter the corrosive bent toward "private venture" and "dissociated ambition." By the end of World War I, it seemed apparent that the rugged economic individualism of an earlier era was not only out of date, but was pernicious. Social observers were beginning to take sober stock of the fragmented and impersonal landscape that presented itself. They saw an urban industrial world in which, as Stuart Ewen says, there was a grim lack of "positive bonds between people. The individualism which had been at the heart of liberal bourgeois thought throughout the preceding century and a half had turned rancid, had become the core of uncertainty and social degeneration." Many blamed the "selfish competitiveness" of the traditional classroom and a musty curriculum "which seemed intent on creating the lonely, imperious, self-reliant person."⁴¹ As the focus of economic life shifted from production to consumption, society found itself depending, as Christopher Lasch says, "on highly organized forms of cooperation instead of on individual exertion." There was need to curb the competitive individualism that stressed everyone working for his own self-interest as an independent economic unit and to substitute a new ethos of common effort, teamwork, and institutional membership. At one time, deferred gratification had been a means to self-improvement and economic independence. Now self-denial was urged for the good of the group. Business-oriented educational spokesmen were calling for the "socially efficient" person, whom William Bagley defined as one who performed his specialized productive task for society, "sacrificing his own pleasure when this interferes with the productive efforts of his fellows."

From about 1890 to 1930, during the years that fall under the umbrella "Progressive," educational philosophy and practice were transformed. The autocratic methods and mechanical atmosphere of the "isolated" common school were replaced by what was called "child-centered" instruction, an emphasis on diversity and revived links with "real life" and the community. The new philosophy would produce the comprehensive high school, tracking, and educational testing; it would add civics and home economics, shops and laboratories, and create a whole new extracurriculum organized around student athletics (with gymnasiums, swimming pools, and playing fields), school newspapers, clubs, and student government. Yet it also faced education with the all but

hopeless task of reconciling two increasingly disparate aims: promoting full individual growth, and preparing the child to enter the work force and contribute productively to society.

Throughout the twenties, the pendulum of educational practice swung both ways. On the one side reformers like Dewey tried hard to show that the interests of society and the individual were harmonious and mutually fulfilling, that the real beneficiaries of developing human potential to its maximum would be the institutions of society. On the other side, "educational executives" like Ellwood P. Cubberly were comparing the administration of a school system to that of a national bank. The individual, he believed, must be molded to fit the specified requirements of institutional society:

Our schools are, in a sense, factories in which the raw materials are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of the twentieth century civilization, and it is the business of the school to build its pupils to the specifications laid down.⁴²

These two general aims of individual growth and social control, of liberating reform and social adjustment, mixed and clashed in varying degrees throughout the era. While no neat philosophic line divides the two decades between the wars, progressive emphasis on the child as a "free personality" and the need for "individual self-fulfillment" tended to be more vociferous in the twenties, when even small town communities like Muncie, Indiana—whose schools were bastions against the metropolitan temptations of the flaming youth culture of flappers, "boozers," and "artists"—found it fashionable to adopt progressive rhetoric as a show of modernity. But during the depression years, the need to shore up a battered status quo and reaffirm traditional ways "overwhelmed earlier commitments to individual differences and student exploration."⁴³ When the Lynds returned to Muncie in 1935, the subject of their pioneering study *Middletown* ten years earlier, they found it more committed than ever to older values, to the idea that "work is an inherently honorable thing by which other activities are measured," that a man owed it to his family and to society to "succeed" through initiative,

hard, persevering work, and thrift. In the thirties the scales seemed to tip in favor of increasing emphasis on "working together," cooperative learning, and adjusting individuals to institutions.

The Coming of Human Relations

This shift toward social adjustment was in part a response to changing notions of what it took to get ahead in the world, which society in the twenties and thirties defined almost exclusively as "business success." The image of the self-made, conventionally ruthless businessman, iron-willed and aloof, was being replaced by the salesman, the glad-hander, the man with "personality" who knew how to strike the human chord in others, make them like him and his product or service. Persuasiveness, manipulation, and the techniques of "human relations" were becoming prominent in all economic sectors, as industrial psychology sought to smoothe out frictions in the factory, and as marketing research and advertising moved into high gear the immense task of creating a mass consumer culture. The new watchword in business was "service." According to Bruce Barton, president of a highly successful advertising firm, Jesus himself had succeeded because he was a "sociable man." In a book called *The Man Nobody Knows* (1924), Barton pointed out that Christ was the "Founder of Modern Business," for the key to success in modern business had lain dormant for two thousand years in the simple injunction: "whosoever of you will be chiefest, shall be the servant of all." Ads were now proclaiming, "we are great because of our service" and "we serve, therefore we grow." The new progressive pedagogy seemed well suited to such a view. As Robert L. Church puts it, "What better educational preparation for this kind of business world than a curriculum and extra-curriculum that stressed social learning, group projects, teamwork in the classroom and on the playing field, than a school which stressed well-roundedness, the ability to get along, to be popular, to take part constantly in group activities?"⁴⁴

But education was responding to more than the social demands of the marketplace. Some part of the national psyche had been mourning the loss of a sense of community ever since the Industrial Revolution gathered momentum after the Civil War. Progressive reformers now saw the school as a logical place to begin to remedy the urban estrangement that made man a cipher in a crowd with no real sense of a shared set of interests.

This concern lay at the heart of Dewey's thinking about schooling which, as Rush Welter says, in one way and another completely "reoriented American educational theory." The sweep of industrialism, Dewey believed, had uprooted the household and community life that earlier had eased the child's passage into adulthood by "naturally" teaching "habits of order and industry" and instilling "the idea of responsibility and obligation to produce something in the world." Dewey called upon the school to become a community in itself, reflecting the life of the larger society, and help restore, through the development of what he called "social imagination," a sense of interdependence, of vital membership in the greater whole. During the 1920s Dewey's ideas were woven, often selectively, into the new educational attempts to achieve social efficiency by the somewhat paradoxical goal of promoting individual growth through self-sacrifice and cooperation.

In 1918 the Kingsley Committee report, setting the rhetorical tone of a trend to follow, declared that each individual's personality should be developed "primarily through activities designed for the well-being of his fellow members." That same year William Kilpatrick first outlined in print the project method, which in some variety or other is what progressive pedagogy would boil down to in most classrooms of the era. Kilpatrick became known as the great interpreter and popularizer of Dewey's theories. Rejecting the idea of a curriculum fixed-in-advance, he defined a project as "purposeful activity" generated by the child's own need to know or solve or construct, and "proceeding in a social environment." As Lawrence Cremin points out, however, "in seeking to make Dewey's ideas manageable for mass consumption by the teaching profession," Kilpatrick ended by transforming them into something quite different from the originals. Kilpatrick's project method, drawing on Thorndike's stimulus-response theory of learning, tended to

reinforce socially desired conduct and attitudes through group sanctions. "The approval and disapproval of our comrade," he wrote, was much more effective than teacher coercion, which merely resulted in "outward" conformity. Dewey's notion of learning by doing demanded flexibility, but as Robert Church observes, "the more widely it was disseminated, the more inflexible the method became." Instead of evolving from individual or group purposes, projects became "totally preplanned" by textbook writers, methods teachers, and curriculum specialists. Dewey had never intended that the individual submerge his personal identity in the group, but as Joel Spring notes, "methods of organizing group projects and of creating the spirit of cooperative endeavor . . . almost inevitably led to a concentration on techniques that emphasized conformity to group standards."⁴⁵ Many considered such conditioning realistic training for the business world. A book entitled *The Socialized Recitation*, published in 1915, described a socialized arithmetic period in which the student "learns to hold his own in a junior business world," and redefined "self-reliance" as the ability to handle group judgments, "to listen even pleasantly to just interpretations and objections." Teachers were instructed to promote in children the belief that "sacrifice and service for our neighbor are the best fruits of life." Joel Spring finds the spirit of this approach distilled in the remark of an Omaha high school teacher. She praised socialized recitation because it prepared students for an adult world that demanded "a sort of social like-mindedness."⁴⁶

A Lonely Crowd

It has not been hard for historians or social scientists to see formative connections between this kind of schooling and the "like-mindedness" that attracted so much attention as Riesman's "other-directed" person, Whyte's "organization man," Packard's "status-seekers," and Mills's "new middle class." By the late forties and fifties, social critics were loudly lamenting the loss of nineteenth-century self-reliance. In *The Lonely Crowd*, David Riesman pictured a new national character whose backbone and willpower had been socialized away. According to Riesman, the child had been taught

to rechannel the competitive drive for achievement into a drive for approval from the peer group. One of the fundamental traits forged in an economy of scarcity had been a hardy disdain for "social approval" as a touchstone for judging personal acts. What Riesman defined in retrospect as "inner-directedness," and an earlier generation called "strength of character," had been the mainstay of productive self-sufficiency. "Nobody worried about rigidity of character," wrote Allen Wheelis about that prior era; "it was supposed to be rigid. If it was flexible you couldn't count on it."⁴⁷ The earlier goal of achievement had required "following one's course in the face of social criticism, and bearing personally the risks of one's undertakings." The new goal of social adjustment required the knack of getting along. The hard discipline of the traditional moral virtues had given way to the softness of sociability.

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* captured the dark side of this "lockerroom personality" approach to success. Considered by many to be as close to genuine tragedy as modern theatre could come, its tragic focus is a failure of values in the business world. Willy Loman epitomized what was happening to the individual: the days of rugged enterprise and destiny-shaping were gone, and an impersonal mass society was substituting illusions like "belongingness" for solid accomplishment. Willy succumbs to the "wrong dream" of banking all on the hollow ideal of "personal attractiveness," of being able to create a "personal interest" in the business world. "Be liked," he tells his boys, "and you'll never want." The hero in American fiction was in fact becoming, in the words of Wyndham Lewis, "the absolute victim of circumstances and incapable of choice."

Some recent historians have noted that the national preoccupation with harmony and cooperation was probably inflated, that journalists and academics exaggerated the conformity, the "buttoned-down mind" of the Eisenhower fifties. But even if American youth was, in William Manchester's words, more "withdrawn, cautious, unimaginative, indifferent, and unadventurous" than ever before, group learning could hardly have been the sole cause. The nation had been exhausted by living for some fifteen years at the steady pitch of crisis. The economic disasters of the Great Depression had been followed almost immediately

by a world war. Then in the midst of post-war conversion came the Cold War fear of thermonuclear holocaust and the spirit-freezing witch hunts of McCarthyism. For a full decade, as Joseph C. Goulden says, "America went into a holding period—intellectually, morally, politically," putting its trust in government and authority, and drawing over its head a "stultifying blanket of conformity" and material comfort.⁴⁸

For many the paradigm of this "silent generation" became what William H. Whyte, Jr., called the "organization man," who was "obtrusive in no particular, excessive in no zeal" and whose view of life seemed to sum up the aims of progressive education: "a belief in 'belongingness' as the ultimate need of the individual" and in "the group as the source of creativity." Students were abandoning the humanities in droves and becoming business administration majors, Whyte observed, and no longer dreamed of going into business for themselves. They wanted to work for someone else, and the bigger the firm the better. Submerging themselves in the busy routine of a large corporation seemed to many a way of just "going through the motions," enabling them to put their real energies into non-vocational interests. As Christopher Lasch says, "the rapid growth of suburbs in this period—the retreat from the job and the city" rested on "a strong impulse to recoil into the satisfactions of family life" and revive domestic virtues. Those who wrote off the nine-to-five portion of their lives were typified by Sloan Wilson's *Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*. Tom Rath wants the raise in salary his new position in public relations will bring, but not if he has to sacrifice his roles as father and husband for it. In the novel's climactic scene Rath tells his boss he's just "not the kind of person who can get all wrapped up in a job."

In the early part of the twentieth century all major forces of socialization converged to blunt the rugged individualism of an earlier out-of-date economy. By the 1920s, corporate capitalism's national program of advertising to standardize taste for a mass market, the growing use of industrial sociology and "human-factors engineering" as a means of "cooling out" industrial conflict and discontent, and the school's emphasis on cooperative learning, all seemed to nurture a social character for the world of corporate production and mass

consumerism. Yet even before social critics began to disparage "togetherness," the wane of self-command, rugged honesty, and rural virtues, the seeds of a different kind of individualism had been sown.

Psychologizing the Work Ethic

The conflict we have noted in progressive educational thought between individual needs and the interests of society is of course as old as civilization itself. In 1930, in his great work *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud defined it as the irreducible dilemma of human society as we know it. The formula is well known. Man creates culture for his survival and collective happiness, but at the price of renouncing the gratification of important instinctual needs. Through the ingenious dynamics of sublimation these repressed needs are converted into energy fed back into the culture. Work is the primary arena in which thwarted libidinal forces are transformed into the productive activity that makes civilization hum. The question Freud left unresolved was whether the cost of this bargain is too high. For while the "irreversible" process of repressive control yields the benefits of civilization, it also guarantees neurosis. The individual becomes neurotic "because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of its cultural ideals."⁴⁹

In refining this formula, Herbert Marcuse focused the problem in terms of "surplus repression." The malaise of modern civilization is the result of the "additional controls over and above those indispensable for civilized human association." When one ponders the nineteenth-century fervor with which faith in work was preached as an almost religious cure for the human condition, what Carlyle called the "purifying fire" of regular labor, it is hard not to view the Victorians—those first really encountering the "surplus repression"—as embracing the sublimative powers of work with a vengeance.

In a much-quoted footnote, Freud described the value of work for the economics of the libido: "no other technique for the conduct of life attaches the individual so firmly to reality as laying emphasis on work;

for his work at least gives him a secure place in a portion of reality, in the human community." The career educators and government commissions that cite this generally omit the important qualification that comes with it. Freud was not referring to labor or even white-collar work, but rather to professional work, and ideally that of the scientist or artist. And even within such an elite group he concluded "the weak point of this method is that it is not applicable generally: it is accessible only to a few people." As a "path to happiness, work is not highly prized by men."⁵⁰ In the long history of Freudian revision, the tendency has been to view the cold-blooded "pessimism" of Freud's analysis as part of the bleak inscape of nineteenth-century materialism, and to seek more humane and liberal versions. Russell Jacoby sees the results as a kind of "social amnesia." To read successively Freud, the neo-Freudians, and the post-Freudians, he says, is to witness "the repression of critical thought."⁵¹

As psychoanalytic thought is domesticated into the so-called "mental hygiene" movement, the traditional commitment to work takes on a new conceptual language. The virtues of hard work become psychological instead of moral. It is no longer "character" that work benefits, but the "ego" or "psyche," and not so much social obligation as personal need that work satisfies. While this view fosters a growing cultural appetite for "self-fulfillment," it supplies a perspective in which virtue can become a vice. Too much work, work for the wrong reasons or without the ballast of humane purpose, is sick. The term "workaholic" is coined to capture the pathological dimension of enterprise. Ambition, as nineteenth-century capitalism bequeathed it to modern society, is defined by popular neo-Freudians like Fromm as a culturally sanctioned form of insanity. While the sediment of such thinking was seeping into public consciousness during the decades following the twenties, it was also, in conjunction with the press of economic events, helping to shape school practice. For if, as modern critics and revisionist historians claim, the twentieth century school has functioned as a service agency to the dominant bureaucracies of our society, stifling initiative and rewarding "mindless" passivity, it has at the same time helped cultivate an egocentric focus on personal fulfillment.

As we have seen, while one core strand of progressivism promoted training in collective thinking, emphasizing projects and problems requiring group solution, another strand insisted on the "indivisibility of the child." Impelled in part by social science's growing interest in the origins and nature of the "self," the thrust of this "child-centeredness" persisted quietly through years of stormy educational debate and evolved into what Maslow later called "self-actualization" and Fromm popularized as "personal authenticity" and a "genuine expression of self." The pivotal word is "self," and liberal rhetoric will string on the end of it an interminable series of liberating nouns and participles, like "-realization," "-understanding," "-direction," "-fulfillment," "-paced," "-selected," in an effort to humanize education. One result, invisible at first, was to gradually accustom the child to the tacit notion that he or she was a Self, a unique identity with its own special potential, with personal needs other than economic and social ones, and that happiness, well-being, and occupational success would depend in large part on finding out what they were and gratifying them.

This tendency was obliquely strengthened by economic events in the thirties, when hard times served to boost the school's custodial function. In the years preceding the Great Depression, the rhetoric of conservative progressivism had couched all its goals—"worthy home-membership, vocation and citizenship" and even leisure—in terms of imposing a commitment to social service on the child. In its Cardinal Principles announced in 1918, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education wrote:

This leisure, if worthily used, will recreate [the student's] powers . . . thereby making him better able to meet his responsibilities. The unworthy use of leisure . . . lessens vocational efficiency, and destroys civic-mindedness.⁵²

But now, since young people were not wanted in the labor pool or on the streets, schools discovered the need to mute vocational zeal and suspend such participatory civic-mindedness for a while. This need was reflected most notably in the development of a substantial extracurriculum organized around student government, student journalism, clubs, drama, assemblies, social events like rallies and dances, and especially student athletics. Small

cities all over America invested a good deal of social energy in their "hometown" teams, especially "winning" teams. In a sense they were pressing an out-of-favor competitiveness into the service of manufacturing a spirit of community solidarity. In Elmtown and Middletown "local businessmen gave star players money and merchandise as rewards; players received inordinate social prestige in the town; and in the school they were excused from academic work."⁵³ Extracurricular activities "moved to center stage," as Charles Burgess and Merle Borrowman put it, because of the need to keep occupied—or preoccupied—a generation of idle and uncommitted youth, for whom there was no place in the labor market. Guidance counselors began to talk less of vocational choice and more of "self-realization." Burgess and Borrowman believe that this focus on "effective use of leisure time" as a diversion from the economic mainstream, rather than as a means of "recreating" one's occupational powers, was a significant step in the culture's shift from productive to consummatory values.⁵⁴ The bent toward self-gratification quietly fostered by this sanction of the new "gospel of play" in a hard-nosed business society was strengthened in the forties by life-adjustment education with its emphasis on "physical, mental, and emotional health" and the "importance of personal satisfactions and achievements for each individual within the limits of his abilities." As the major forms of popular culture soaked up this predisposition, even before there was a palpable (and profitable) "youth culture," children learned from radio, movies, and television, in soap operas, kiddie shows, situation comedies and melodrama, that they were indeed living in a "child-centered age."

In the meantime, the new ideology of consumerism was working to similar effect. In his book, *Captains of Consciousness*, Stuart Ewen has recently traced the strategic development of advertising during the twenties as American industrial culture took on the task of creating a "predictable, buying, homogeneous national character" for its mass markets. As one necessary step in the process of socializing the family to consumerism, advertising exploited the loneliness and insecurity of modern industrial life. Adapting techniques from the new behavioral psychology, it identified social acceptance with the consumption process and deliberately sought to create a kind of national self-consciousness, to make people uneasy about their breath,

enlarged nose pores, skin texture, hair color, to make them dissatisfied with their current appearance, taste, artifacts, and lifestyles. In a variety of ways, Ewen illustrates, advertising played upon the fears, boredoms and eroding effects of urban industrial life. "Fatigue with the futility of modern life" was channeled toward a "fatigue with apparel and goods used in one's immediate surroundings." For example, it made muted appeals to the agrarian myth in order to further "embroil" people in that commercial urban life. Ewen cites a 1924 facial ad that begins by admitting that

Modern living has robbed women of much of their natural color . . . taken away the conditions that once gave natural roses in the cheeks.⁵⁵

The ideal of mass consumption was created by techniques that tended to focus societal discontent on a critical preoccupation with the self. While "treating all people as mechanically identical" in "all mental and social characteristics"⁵⁶ to forge the uniform wants of a mass market, at the same time it fostered a "self fetishization." In the nineteenth century one bought only what one needed, only when it was needed. Twentieth-century consumerism promoted the principle, as Eric Fromm says, that every desire must be satisfied immediately, no wish must be frustrated. In the nineteenth century you improved your character, inner qualities, by exercising moral virtues, many of which centered around hard work. You did it, at least in theory, by acting from within, through an exertion of will. Now you improved yourself cosmetically, from without, by applying a thousand techniques of commercial hygiene to the self (and the self's surroundings) as an object that needs grooming, rehabilitating, to be "made up."

Thus the quest for personal authenticity and self-fulfillment, which many now see as a national preoccupation, has been long in the making. If, as Christopher Lasch says, the narcissist is replacing the seeker of success and status in the ideological shift from deferred to immediate gratification, it is in part because education since the twenties has been on a parallel course with consumerism. Advertising's long campaign to create a commodity-pacifying egoism and the school's promotion of self-realization both helped lay the groundwork for the "new individualism" that emerged as part of the social revolution of the sixties and soon found its way into the workplace.

POST-SCARCITY AND THE QUEST FOR POTENCY

We have seen how the work ethic—that galaxy of assumptions, ideals, and beliefs animating a work-tied culture—has been undergoing metamorphic change since the nineteenth century. The metamorphosis has not been a smooth or quiet one. The whole social history of work in America since the Civil War has been one of ideological stress, as the culture has continuously struggled to reconcile old values with new realities. And yet recent "radical changes" in work values are spoken of as though the work ethic had not been seriously challenged until now, as though its core tenets had persisted as part of a consensual agreement about social ends that seemed to come apart in the 1960s.

This new sense of transformation is part of some fundamental changes in American society that have become apparent since World War II. For if, as Lord Bryce said in 1880, "America is change," if disturbing flux has been the historic norm, it has surged enough in recent years to bring us into a "new era," a "post-industrial epoch." And with it have come new challenges to the traditional commitment to work, new tensions between surviving core strands of the work ethic and socioeconomic realities. Of the many new epithets in use, the one that best evokes the problems we want to look at now is "post-scarcity."

Like Dicken's "best and worst of times," the post-scarcity era is one of extremes, of counteractive effects. Unprecedented material well-being has brought with it some unprecedented spiritual angst. The affluent society promotes self-gratification and at the same time nullifies it. Thus the changing meaning of work can be accounted for by two fundamentally different views: one is that things have gotten better, the other is that they have gotten worse.

According to the first, an economy of unparalleled abundance has freed large numbers of people from the traditional preoccupation with subsistence, and given them the leisure to brood about meaning. We have climbed Maslow's

ladder to the point where "the hungry psyche has replaced the hungry belly." As Robert Blauner puts it, "the focus has shifted from a concern with economic and social justice to a concern with the quality of the inner life."⁵⁷ The problem is that in many ways people have never had it so good. Along with the benefits of a limitless vista of technological progress, what Freud called "a natural human aversion to work" is inevitably surfacing as part of a revolution of rising expectations. The more people get, the more they want.

The other view is that the alienating effects of the industrial transformation have continued to degrade the experience of work, but in subtler form. The sweatshops and 12-to-16-hour workday are gone, work is cleaner and safer, and employee benefits and services have made work physically much easier. But scientific management, as it continues to rationalize and mechanize work in its incessant quest for ways to cut costs and increase control, further empties work of its moral content and makes the workplace more sterile. At the same time, we are entering a period which Henry Ford II has called "capitalism on trial." The nation's unswerving and prodigiously successful pursuit of material gain under advanced corporate capitalism has revealed a spiritual bankruptcy, and the liberal faith that economic progress equals social progress has about run its course.

Reality doubtless lies somewhere in between. Our purpose here is to try to get some fix on how the truth in both views is affecting cultural expectations toward work, how the basic cultural shifts we have been looking at are posing some new ideological dilemmas. Most of them begin with the new context of plenty. As Michael Maccoby puts the prevailing view,

Once a certain level of affluence is taken for granted, this tends to undermine attitudes based on principles of scarcity that one must sacrifice individual expression and growth in order to survive.⁵⁸

The point of course is not that plenty has vanquished poverty or inequity, but that a new climate prevails. The magic of technology appears to provide limitlessly for material needs and to banish the fear of scarcity. By relaxing the historic work-or-starve law, "eroding the bases for the Protestant work

ethic," Louis E. Davis observes, "this capability of technology reinforces the evolving values of self-actualization and self-expression."⁵⁹

Welfare Statism

No small part of this dwindling fear of economic insecurity, certainly as far as the pre-war generation is concerned, is the fact that the horrors of the Great Depression have begun to fade in the national memory; an entire generation has grown up and entered the work force without ever knowing the spectre of unemployment as some 17 million knew it in the early thirties. Before 1929 America had weathered seventeen or more depressions, some of them severe, and times of hunger and mass unemployment were not new. But this one was different. As Milton Meltzer says, "It came on harder and faster, engulfed a larger part of the population, it lasted much longer, and did far more and far worse damage than any before it."⁶⁰ William Manchester has recently given us a hard glimpse of what today's youth are serenely oblivious to, what joblessness in the thirties was like—the bread lines, the make-shift hovels of dispossessed families, men roaming the country in boxcars looking for work. *Fortune*, he says, estimated in September 1932 that 34 million men, women, and children—nearly 28 percent of the population—were without any income whatever. "Millions stayed alive by living like animals," eating wild weed-roots and dandelions and ransacking garbage cans and refuse heaps. Children in school were afflicted with drowsiness, lethargy, and sleepiness. Manchester tells of a teacher who "suggested that one little girl go home and eat something; the child replied, 'I can't. This is my sister's day to eat.'"⁶¹ The memory of these nightmarish years stood for decades in the American mind as the paramount symbol of the kind of economic insecurity always lurking in a wage-earning world. Yet while the Great Depression seemed to reinforce the "industrial ethic" by brutally underscoring the modern law that bound eating and wages, ultimately it helped undermine or modify that law by reshaping the government we live under.

The New Deal's response to the Depression set in motion the great shift from the *laissez-faire* capitalism still preeminent under Coolidge and Hoover to a state welfare capitalism. If the history of America since the nineteenth

century has been the steady expropriation by institutions of responsibilities formerly left to the individual and community, that process took something like a quantum leap with the legislation launched in F.D.R.'s first 100 days. During the years to follow, the federal government took into its hands, to a degree unprecedented in history, responsibility for the care and well-being of the individual. The growth of a vast governmental system of service, assistance, and protection agencies and programs, on the one hand, and America's staggering wealth and high material standard of living on the other, has fostered a "psychology of entitlement," which — while not quite the "world-owes-me-a-living" attitude scorned by defenders of free enterprise — is an incremental social process whereby wants or desires become converted into a set of presumed individual rights. The process of course did not start with the New Deal. In 1923 United States Steel switched from a twelve- to an eight-hour day. In 1926 Henry Ford inaugurated the five-day week, and International Harvester announced the "electrifying innovation" of a two-week annual paid vacation. But the creation of the new "public state" with its swelling plexus of bureaucratic services, enhancing civil liberties, consumer rights, expanding medical care and unemployment insurance, has, while encouraging this sense of "dueness," at the same time tended to syphon off even more individual responsibility and to further erode the long-standing ideal of mutual assistance at the local community level. You do not go to your neighbor for help, and his needs are not your concern. Whatever the problem is, there are agencies to take care of it. Indeed, modern mass society hardly consists of neighbors or even neighborhoods. It consists instead, as Robert Green says, of "agencies, organizations, districts, areas, institutions, corporations," that create the kind of institutional dependence that can "freeze and deaden" human initiative. Joel Spring goes so far as to conclude that "In the nineteenth century man lost the product of his labor; in the twentieth century man lost his will."⁶² Certainly without such a climate of institutional paternalism, in which the individual becomes more and more accustomed to resigning hitherto inviolately private areas of responsibility to the larger society, it is hard to account for such bizarre occurrences as an employee suing his employer for allowing him to smoke on the job.

If the ancient work-or-starve law is relaxing, then, it is partly because people no longer live with the near certainty that they will go hungry if they do not work. There are too many alternatives. And the traditional stigma attached to many of them—from unemployment compensation to street culture panhandling—is being replaced by the growing feeling that our affluent society can well afford to help those who for whatever reason can't cut it in today's system. The point is not that the value of self-help has disappeared—it is precisely its strong persistence as an ideal that acts as a source of tension in corporate society—but that the new context of abundance has, on the one hand, helped nourish the assertiveness of Yankelovich's New Breed, its demand for greater meaning and more say-so in the workplace, and on the other, has amplified the prototype of "hobo" into all manner, class and degree of "drop-outs."

From Thrift to Consumerism

While Americans seem to have embraced the ideology of consumerism so wholeheartedly that many may find an alternative hard to even imagine, it is important to remind ourselves how deep-rooted a part of the American culture frugality has always been, and how short a time the ethos of consumption has reigned.

As we saw earlier, thrift lay at the heart of the pre-industrial work ethic. It began as a subsistence virtue forged in a life of chronic scarcity, what an eighteenth-century shoemaker called the "dearness of all the necessities of life." For almost two centuries, a decent livelihood in towns and survival in a frontier environment had depended not just on diligence and sweat but also on careful husbanding of scarce and hard-won goods. Pre-modern capitalism, of course, very early turned thrift into a commercial value, one endlessly preached in the simple philosophy of work, save, and prosper. Indeed it was Franklin's tireless winnowing of all the ways that "time is money" which Max Weber pronounced a "philosophy of avarice" and D.H. Lawrence called a "barbed wire morality." But it was also an ethical value, for Franklin's distillation of frugality as, "Make no expense but to

do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing," reflected the culture's confirmed belief that to mispend money, time, or human energy was to use them in ways that benefited no one. For some two hundred years Americans had been unremittingly instructed in the morality of conserving, the virtue of patient parsimony, and the immorality of incontinence. Then, in a remarkably short space of time the country had plunged into an age of extravagant consumption. Starting in the twenties, as we have seen, Americans were "elaborately and skillfully and expensively instructed," as Galbraith says, in the advantages of buying and consuming products.

The Depression seemed momentarily to revive the waning values of scarcity. Impoverished families scrimped in every way: resharpening and reusing old razor blades, retailoring clothes, using 25-watt bulbs, buying soup bones, growing their own vegetables, cutting their own hair, and gleaning coal from railroad tracks to burn at home. In 1935, as might be expected, Lund found "Scarcity" to be one of Middletown's most central cultural concepts, more fundamental than even "Democracy" or "Christianity." But it proved to be a brief moratorium, lasting a decade and a half, as scarcity changed in quality from the grim deprivation of the Depression years to the patriotically (if petulantly) endured shortages and enforced savings of the war economy. The industrial boom of the war years, which saw the gross national product rise from \$91 billion to \$166 billion in 1945, restored what John Morton Blum calls "the circumstances for a carnival of consumption." Wartime rationers soon were contemplating "a postwar consumer's nirvana."

The nirvana came, along with the installment plan, credit card, and easy loan, inextricably binding the good life to the values of consumption, as a family's standard of living became an index of its achievement. In post-scarcity society, as Galbraith says, "the consumption of goods" becomes "the prime measure of social accomplishment," and the oft-repeated encomium that this country has achieved the highest standard of living in history "takes for granted that the level of consumption is the proper measure of social merit." Between 1952 and 1956 consumer debt increased 55 percent in what has been described as a "materialistic binge." As America moved into the so-called Golden Age of advertising, and social status seemed increasingly defined in

terms of the commodities and commercial recreation an income could purchase — "keeping up with the Joneses," two-car garages, garbage disposals, power mowers, air-conditioning units, swimming pools, rotary barbeques, summer camps, and clubs — work was increasingly "redefined as a way of achieving satisfactions or consolations outside work."⁶³

But change in economic habits can be managed — especially with the manipulative machinery of modern advertising and the corporate engineering of "demand" and supply — a lot faster than a fundamental change in values. For while consumerism may be conceived as economic fulfillment, morally it can be experienced as waste, as the "put-away society" becomes the "throw-away society." Nowhere in the new culture's incessant argument for consumption are offered ideas of moral usefulness or social betterment to serve as a counterweight to the daily "violation" of the deep-rooted, culturally shared aversion to waste. Thrift and frugality may be displaced economically, as abundance threatens to turn into glut, but their ethical force is not easily disposed of in so short a time, only driven underground, where it generates a vague sense of cultural misgivings, a values bind, what Bennett Berger calls a "moral uneasiness." Whereas in 1925 a leading newspaper in Muncie could proclaim that "The American citizen's first importance to his country is no longer that of citizen but that of consumer," today one reads editorials about "commodity junkies." And of course the uneasiness is not merely a domestic one. An ecological crisis is looming — not just resource depletion and energy shortages, but destruction of the whole ecosystem — calling for the stark necessity of modifying the exploitative attitudes and practices that have historically characterized industrial culture.

Post-Scarcity Work

An economy based increasingly on consumption, an "era of temporary products to serve temporary needs," of "built-in obsolescence" and "instant junk," can have profound effects on the meaning and experience of work. As social philosophers like Thomas Green and Hannah Arendt have pointed out, western civilization has since the time of the ancient Greeks assumed (for

the most part tacitly) a distinction between work and labor that placed at the very heart of work in all its senses the notion of usefulness, durability. But things formerly made to be used, as Green says, are now made to be used up, so that something called the Gross National Product may expand. "The principal characteristic of labor," says Green, "is its futility: it is effort expended without any consequence in achievement."⁶⁴ When products are designed for almost instant death, energy formerly expended to produce "a work" is now expended on ephemerality. "That is the transformation of work into labor." But use is not just a question of durability. The work ethic, even in its most secular terms, had defined the moral essence of frugality as making no expense that lacked human benefit: "waste nothing." It is this relatively new sense of superfluity, of the essential needlessness of so much that constitutes the goods and services in a profit-oriented consumer society, that casts the question of work more and more as a problem of purpose:

The waste and irrationality which characterize production under corporate capitalism also limit the opportunities for rewarding work. The alienated white-collar worker lacks a personal identification with the product of her or his labor not simply because the product is owned by the capitalist, but because, in many cases, the product does not meet any real human need.⁶⁵

"What good is it?" "What is its use?" When that question "is widely asked among a population," says Thomas Green, "it is a clue that people are uncertain of the worth of their jobs and, as a consequence, uncertain of their own worth."⁶⁶ In 1956 Paul Goodman opened the current debate over the quality of work in America with his claim that it was absurd to expect young people to grow into responsible adulthood in a culture where there are "fewer and fewer jobs that are necessary or unquestionably useful." American society had tried "so hard and so ably to defend the practice and theory of production for profit and not primarily for use," he said, "that now it has succeeded in making its jobs and products profitable and useless."⁶⁷ If an unquestioning immersion in occupational routine during the fifties could be characterized paradoxically as a "withdrawal" from work into the solace of family and consumption, the legacy of the sixties has been this critical scrutiny of work's

shortcomings, the national "discovery" of the need for "worthwhile work." As the more materialistic forms of consumerism— notions of success shaped around money, occupational status, and possessions— begin to give way to the values of personal fulfillment and self-expression, the wastefulness of a post-scarcity economy is increasingly viewed in terms of its ultimate resource: human beings. Corporate capitalism has created roles and required behavior that our traditional moral rhetoric is unequipped to honor. "Consider the strain on our moral vocabulary," says Bennett Berger, "if it were asked to produce heroic myths of accountants, computer programmers, and personnel executives."⁶⁸ Our moral imagery of human types, as many observers have pointed out, is still rooted in nineteenth-century notions of self-reliance, enterprise, and independence. These values, so firmly fixed in American mythology, are perpetuated and celebrated in our national rhetoric and in such popular art forms as the "Western," but are experienced as "irrelevant to the conditions of decision and action" created by corporate society.

Social criticism of the dehumanizing effects of industrialism has traditionally focused on blue-collar work. The labor movement stressed the special worth and dignity of those who did the world's "real" work, partly as Daniel Rodgers says, "out of a sense of acute degradation." But since the sixties critics have increasingly focused public attention on the degradation of work in all spheres: "Consider the men and women in TV advertisements," Paul Goodman wrote. "They are clowns and mannequins . . . alternately they are liars, confidence men, smooth talkers, obsequious, etc., etc. . . ."⁶⁹ A white-collar proletariat of "paper pushers" and "data coolies" has emerged. Bennett Berger observes that we require the talents of the "organization man," but we find the term offensive. We are a society that develops status seekers, but we cannot morally defend status seeking. And a culture that does not know how to honor what it is actually committed to produce creates an uneasy population. Social tension created by the current emphasis on work as a source of self-respect and nonmaterial reward must be understood within this framework, which Thomas Green has summarized in simple terms:

✓

We have learned to view work as the way in which a man defines for himself who he is and what he shall do with his life. The difficulty is, however, that today men must do this increasingly in a society that lists among its primary purposes the efficient production of goods and services rather than the celebration of human dignity.⁷⁰

New notions of dignity centering around the quest for personal authenticity and civil rights seem increasingly incompatible with the nature and organization of work that is characteristic of advanced industrial society.

The psychologizing of American culture seems to pull its thinking about work in two different directions at the same time. On the one hand, the quest for self-actualization, by putting the unique individual "quivering with potential" at the center of social gravity, further weakens the earlier commitment to work that rested on ideas of social obligation, duty, moral utility, and it vitiates notions of success based on status-seeking, achievement, and material consumption. It feeds the anti-authoritarianism and general loosening of loyalty to organizations characteristic of the "new worker." Yet at the same time, viewing work as a means of satisfying deep inner needs weights it with new importance, giving it "a crucial and perhaps unparalleled psychological role in the formation of self-esteem, identity . . . sense of order and mastery over self and environment."⁷¹ This contemporary view of work's axial, formative role in a person's life is well summarized by Elliot Jacques:

By forcing him to come to grips with his environment, with his livelihood at stake, it confronts him with the actuality of his personal capacity—to exercise judgment, to achieve concrete and specific results. It gives him a continuous account of his correspondence between outside reality and the inner perception of that reality, as well as an account of the accuracy of his appraisal of himself In short, a man's work does not satisfy his material needs alone. In a very deep sense, it gives him a measure of his sanity.⁷²

But conceiving of work as the individual's primary link with reality can, in a system of advanced industrial capitalism, put an existential burden on the workplace it is generally ill-equipped to bear. Ernest Becker, in his

last two books, *Denial of Death* and *Escape From Evil*, put the problem of "meaning" and work into a useful perspective. While agreeing with Freud that culture is invented by man for his collective survival, Becker argues that it is not repressed sexual energy but rather "repression of death" that culture is built on, the attempt to transcend, through culture, man's "creatureliness," the realization that he is "a small trembling animal who will decay and die." Every society sets up its hero system within which man must justify himself as an object of primary value in the universe. "It doesn't matter whether the cultural hero-system is frankly magical, religious, and primitive, or secular, scientific, and civilized." Its function is the same: to enable human beings to earn a feeling of primary value, of cosmic specialness, of ultimate usefulness to creation, of unshakable meaning. Only this achieved sense of "heroic" worth, Becker says, can allay man's existential dread of his fundamental expendability in nature. Becker believed that

The crisis of modern society is precisely that the youth no longer feel heroic in the plan for action that their culture has set up . . . the plain debasing and silly heroics of the acquisition and display of consumer goods, the piling up of money and privileges that now characterize a whole way of life.⁷³

The point that Becker's analysis helps clarify is simply this: man's need for a sense of primal worth (however we choose to define its organic source) is as old as human society; what is historically recent is the idea that it can be achieved in the narrow arena of paid employment in modern corporate society. While work has become an increasingly circumscribed realm of social life, more people than ever before consciously expect to derive meaning from it. The reason may well be, as Becker and others argue, that people in modern society are hard put to find meaning anywhere else, that traditional sources—from pre-scientific world view to communal vitality—have steadily collapsed. As Sigmund Nosow observes, "Whereas in earlier eras family, community, and religious activities were expected to give meaning to work, today we expect work to give meaning to other areas of life."⁷⁴ This is what historian Adriano Tilgher means by saying that work

as a source of creative fulfillment is a modern invention. Man has always ✓
sought a personal sense of worth through culturally approved forms of making,
doing, achieving, but only in modern times has he had to look for it in such
a conscious way, and look for it in a job he pursues in a segmented part of
his day.

Presumably, even in pre-industrial America (and despite the growing
tendency to romanticize craftsmanship), work as experienced by artisans,
farmers, and merchants was much more capable of providing this sense of
inherent value because (1) it had not been degraded to a system of "wage
slavery" nor ethically neutralized by the modern concept of efficiency and
(2) it intersected at many natural points with the totality of social
experience—from family life to community ritual. The dilemmas of modern
work, on the other hand, arise from its capacity to alienate: its social
compartmentalization, both in terms of geography—the workplace is generally
far from home, often in another town—and its extreme specialization of
knowledge and skill; and the ways its design and social organization can work
against employees investing much of themselves in their jobs, resulting
instead in apathy, indifference, or estrangement. "To take the measure of
one's potency," says Thomas Green, to "prove one's worth, to discover a sphere
of consequential action," something to push against, is the process of
defining self. The modern dilemma, he says, is that "jobs have lost their
value for self-definition."⁷⁵ It is not clear to what extent "jobs" in
industrial society ever had this value. What is clear is that a great many
lack it now. As Levitan and Johnston put it, "there simply aren't enough
meaningful jobs to go around." The urge to see the modern workplace as a
sphere for self-definition can result in the kind of discontent expressed by
Nora Watson in Studs Terkel's *Working*: "Most of us . . . have jobs that are
too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people."⁷⁶

Many observers see the new emphasis on self-actualization at work as
part of a crisis of individual potency. For while personal autonomy has in
fact increased—in the form of social rights and economic safeguards—so
has the absorptive power of bureaucratic life, and the difficulties of
maintaining a sense of self in highly institutionalized mass society. Studies

and polls show that most Americans continue to hold fast to the ideals of traditional individualism. The Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, found in 1971-72 that 70 percent of the American blue-collar workers sampled asserted their belief that anyone who works hard can get ahead, even if his parents were poor, and that if you are unemployed it's probably your own fault. And in a national sample taken by James Morgan in 1964, the majority affirmed their belief in the power of the individual to shape his or her own fate. Yet while such values are affirmed and asserted, evidence suggests they are increasingly experienced as inconsequential. The same surveys show most people don't believe that hard work and initiative pay off. While the anti-authoritarianism that has emerged since the sixties may be viewed as a "reassertion" of one of the most absolutely basic of American values, many stress a qualitative difference. Whereas earlier doctrines of rugged individualism were expressions of a social milieu that seemed to foster them, current claims of self-direction are asserted against conditions that thwart them. If some have found it hard to take very seriously what one observer calls a "chest-thumping about personal autonomy subsidized by weekly trips to get food stamps," others believe the individual is being "administered out of existence," and sees no hope of self-mastery. The most extreme version of this view, argued by Jacques Ellul and Herbert Marcuse, picture modern society as a kind of technological totalitarianism, where a smooth "democratic unfreedom prevails." Thus, in Russell Jacoby's words, it is "not that society has fulfilled the basic material needs and is moving on to higher reaches of liberation, but the reverse: domination is reaching the inner depths of men and women. The last preserves of the autonomous individual are under siege."⁷⁷

A Crisis of Values

Perhaps the least tangible dimension of social change pertinent to work is that of national temperament, Weltanschauung, the culture's sense of itself. People's attitudes toward work, its meaning and place in the scheme of things, do not exist in a vacuum; they are interwoven in the social continuum with

attitudes toward country, political institutions, life in general. The much analyzed separation of work from the rest of life is both real and illusory. It is real in the sense that in our industrialized, specialized mass society we experience life as compartmentalized. But this genuinely experienced fragmentation tends to foster the illusion that there is some discrete, insular mental zone or chamber of thought called "work values," when in fact, as we know, the values, feelings, and beliefs by which a person makes sense out of his or her experience in the workplace are not really separable from those used to weigh, fathom, and interpret the rest of life.

The sociotechnical change America is currently undergoing has been compared in magnitude to the Neolithic revolution, and its "values crisis" has been likened to the Hellenistic Failure of Nerve before the Roman culture eclipsed it. But whether American culture is at the breaking point and is in fact facing a foundational "crisis," or whether it is merely experiencing another phase of the kind of "values lag" that has marked a long history of change, it seems clear that during the last two decades some of its traditional optimism has waned. More than one observer has seen a correlation between this widely expressed disenchantment and the growing emphasis on quality worklife. For despite the recent popular interest in job dissatisfaction, distaste for intrinsically unrewarding work is hardly new. Jane Addams noted in the nineteenth century that people were "unhappy" with "the dreary round of uninteresting work" and the "declining consciousness of brain power" it caused. What may be new is the diminution of a strong sense of national purpose and cohesion that could absorb some of the tedium of "uninteresting" tasks—as it now apparently does in China and Cuba—a certain disillusionment with the larger body politic into which jobs fit.

From the outset, the most potent theme used to justify the industrialization of America was faith in progress. In 1876 Washington Gladden wrote: "The steam-engine, the spinning-jenny, the power-loom, the power-press, the sewing machine, all these mechanical devices by which labor is saved and production increased, are provided for in God's design carrying the race forward to its perfect destiny."⁷⁸ From earliest times, America's buoyant sense of national destiny had rested on its economic prowess, its vast cornucopia of

resources and the Yankee "know-how" that put them to use. By the end of the nineteenth century its expansive mood of national greatness was profoundly materialistic. In his *Triumphant Democracy* Andrew Carnegie wrote:

The old nations of the earth creep on at a snail's pace; the Republic thunders past with the rush of the express. The United States, the growth of a single century, has already reached the foremost rank among nations, and is destined soon to out-distance all others in the race. In population, in wealth, in annual savings, and in public credit; in freedom from debt, in agriculture, and in manufactures, America already leads the civilized world.⁷⁹

During the long swell of prosperity between 1896 and the Great Depression the successful businessman had become American's favorite idol. The state Manual for Secondary Schools for 1923 informed Middletown's teachers that "History furnishes no parallel of national growth, national prosperity, and national achievement like ours." In 1929 the *New York Times* of May 7 ran a full-page ad that proclaimed:

You business executives sitting at your desks, you have been making a fairytale come true. Within ten years you have done more toward the sum of total human happiness than has ever been done before in all the centuries of historical time.⁸⁰

After the Depression, when the esteem of businessmen had plummeted to an unprecedented low, the buoyancy revived as America went to war in a righteous confidence and shared sense of national purpose. Thus even after the age of heroic enterprise had gone, an overarching faith in social progress seemed to prevail as the context in which one worked. The point is not that workers trooped through factory gates or into mine adits quietly lit with the beatifying realization that their toil was virtuous—drudgery was drudgery, then as now. Yet it seemed easier to feel, no matter how abstractly or vaguely, that one was somehow contributing to the common good of a progressing society.

But since World War II America has undergone a series of unprecedented shocks to its traditional image of itself, causing observers to speak of "an emerging climate of mistrust in our basic institutions," a "marked erosion in political confidence," and a "disaffection with conventional America"

reaching beyond Watergate, the Vietnam War, the activism and civil rights movement of the sixties, to a fundamental questioning of both the ends and means of American society. During the last two decades America has "discovered," in a public, popularly acknowledged way, that it has been racist, imperialistic, ruthless, and sexist, and that its materialism has created an "artificial environment" and an ecological crisis. "A well-behaved America has passed away," says Sydney Ahlstrom, "and with it the certitudes that had always shaped the nation's well-being and sense of destiny."⁸¹ Since the Civil War, Free Enterprise has been virtually a national religion. Now there appears to be a rather widespread cynical awareness of what Bowles and Gintis call the "increasingly obvious conflicts between the imperatives of profit and the requirements of human welfare,"⁸² of the fact that, as Michael Harrington puts it, "production decisions are reckoned in terms of private advantage without reference to social consequences," and that the executive, no matter how responsible, "is paid for making money and not for guiding technological change in a humane and decent way."⁸³ Young people have been told by scores of social critics—from Charles Reich to Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.—that the planning of this nation's economy is done "by the exercise of private power without concern for the general good," that its products are often "superfluous, trivial, or dangerous, and are produced for the profit of the few." In other words, the radical critique of capitalism is not so radical anymore. Thus, writes Ivar Berg, not work itself, but "the legitimacy of the 'system'—what and whom one works for—is much in doubt."

And thus the "magic symbol of education," so long seen as a passe partout into that system, the way to "make something of yourself," is correspondingly diminished. It has recently been argued, for example, that "the growing absence of education in our education," the qualitative decline in learning as evidenced in diminishing reading and writing skills and SAT scores, is in part the social fallout of the merchant ethic in education, the increasing demands for "pragmatic, economically useful, dollar-winning 'relevance' in curricula."⁸⁴ David F. Noble contends that modern technology was from the start "nothing more nor less than the transformation of science into a means of capital accumulation." Industrial monopoly, he argues, has appropriated the generation of scientific knowledge by systematically applying it to the

process of commodity production. It could be argued that no small part of contemporary disaffection stems from the visceral if not conscious realization that so much brain power, education, and scientific skill has been used solely for the purpose of producing the commodities that trivialize modern life. Certainly the exigencies of commercial utility can prove disillusioning to those who seek "meaningful" work in the sciences. As Andre Gorz says,

Technicians, engineers, students, researchers discover that they are wage earners like the others, paid for a piece of work which is "good" only to the degree that it is profitable in the short run. They discover that long-range research, creative work on original problems, and the love of workmanship are incompatible with the criteria of capitalist profitability.⁸⁵

The concept of alienation, central to the Marxian analysis of modern society, has long since passed beyond the bounds of orthodox Marxist thought. Indeed, it has become a catch-all term in talking about modern political, religious, artistic, and domestic life. Lately it is being used with increasing precision by sociologists of work. Robert Blauner, for example, working on the assumption that "the alienation perspective can be used scientifically—rather than polemically—to elucidate the complex realities of present-day industrial society," set out in his study *Alienation and Freedom* to identify the "objective conditions" of alienation, which he defines in general terms as follows:

Alienation exists when workers are unable to control their immediate work processes, to develop a sense of purpose and function which connects their jobs to the overall organization of production, to belong to integrated communities, and when they fail to become involved in the activity of work as a mode of personal self-expression.⁸⁶

The need for control, purpose, social integration, and self-involvement, if insufficiently met, becomes four types of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Blauner studied four industries that represented "the extreme developments"—the highly alienating automobile and textile industries, and the freer and more integrated printing and chemical industries. The typical factory worker, he judged, is to be found

somewhere in between with the "mixed" experience of "a high degree of meaninglessness and self-estrangement, a low degree of powerlessness and social alienation." In other words, Blauner concluded in 1964 that the average worker was probably both self-estranged and satisfied; he was relatively content with instrumental and non-involving jobs because he had not "developed needs for control, initiative, and meaning in work." Workers with limited educations, he says, are not bothered by the "absence of opportunities to develop inner potential, to express idiosyncratic abilities, and to assume responsibility for decision-making functions." Therefore, "empirical studies show that the majority of industrial workers are satisfied with their jobs."⁸⁷

It is, of course, precisely this paradox of contented alienation that makes job satisfaction as measured by questionnaires so fruitless an index to the meaning of work. For a clinical view of such survey expressions of contentment is that they are often the result of what Kornhauser calls "dwarfed desires and deadened initiative." In any case, the more recent studies of Yankelovich show that the New Values of the sixties counterculture have begun to diffuse to non-college youth. That is, the younger industrial worker is "developing the needs" Blauner said would transform contented self-estrangement into dissatisfaction. If so, the intrinsic worth of jobs will continue to surface as an issue.

No major study of white-collar work comparable to Blauner's has yet appeared, but all the evidence suggests that if measured against his four dimensions of alienation the results would be about the same. The principles of scientific management, although much refined since the nineteenth century, still prevail in post-industrial society. As Harold Leavitt puts it,

Change the setting from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to Madison Avenue, the time from 1910 to 1962, the costuming from overalls to grey flannels, and the tasks from simple muscular labor to complex scheduling decisions. Then replace time and motion study with linear programming or PERT, and replace the stopwatch with the computer. The story line can remain intact.⁸⁸

Industrial culture is spreading to the service sector, and the behavioral gap between blue- and white-collar work has been closing in recent years.

To the extent that their skills can be routinized and rationalized, managers and professionals are subject to "Taylorism." Keniston notes the parallel between the characteristics of a good worker and a good machine in all sectors of corporate society:

Whether at high levels of management or on the most menial assemblyline tasks, the good worker is highly specialized, is expected to show few feelings, to operate "by the book," to be consistent, systematic, and precise . . . and finds the most important parts of himself systematically ignored.⁸⁹

So the basic dilemmas posed by the industrial transformation of work remain unresolved. As Levitan and Johnston recently put it:

The evolution of the postindustrial economy has clearly not resulted in a "quality of work revolution." . . . millions of dull factory jobs remain, and millions of equally dull office jobs have been lately added to the job market Most jobs are and will remain dull and uncreative.⁹⁰

The issue here is not whether there is widespread worker malaise, but rather to what extent the social and technical structure of the economic system works against "meaning" as it is currently being argued for. While the future of a move toward "innovative restructuring" of jobs remains uncertain, renewed efforts are made to promote the dignity of labor. "Menial" connotations of jobs are attacked through euphemistic title changes ("garbageman" becomes "sanitation worker"), and career education materials promote the "dignity and worth of all work" in nineteenth-century terms characterized by Kenneth Hoyt as: "all honest work possesses innate dignity and worth. Excellence can be attained and rewarded in any occupation . . . the contributions one can make to society stem, to a large extent, from the work one does."⁹¹

But there is a growing belief among educators and social scientists that, as Thomas Green puts it, "this educational approach is not only dysfunctional, but positively cruel in a society where many jobs that need doing cannot possibly provide a sense of self-identity or a central life interest."⁹² Some are calling for pedagogic distinctions between work, labor, and job as a means of separating the idea of productive, worthwhile activity from its previously

exclusive focus on paid employment, thus discouraging the equation of "who one is" with "what one does to earn a living." Others stress the growing importance of leisure as a source of self-fulfillment, as people increasingly turn to nonworking life for values and identity.

Whether one takes the view that the imperatives of profit and efficiency are making post-industrial work intrinsically less rewarding, or rather that in the face of vastly improving working conditions, as Rosabeth Kanter says, "people continue to want more even as they get more" and their expectations are outstripping the realities of work possibilities, each points to the question of work's centrality. For the affluent society appears to be challenging in some unprecedented ways the absolute core of the traditional ethic—the moral and psychological primacy of work.

Leisure: Liberation or the Devil's Work?

Central to this whole question, of course, is the "free time" made available to people by the affluent society in order to consume its plenty. Hours of work have been steadily declining. The 12-hour day gave way to the 10- and then the 8-hour standard, and the 40-hour, 5-day week became the norm in 1940. While it has remained the standard for three decades, certain unions have recently gained a 35- and even 25-hour week, and both flextime and the four-day week show signs of increasing. The paid vacations, holidays, disability, and retirement which people take for granted today were either unknown or extremely limited for hourly paid employees before World War II. This "revolution in paid leisure time" is viewed as both cause and elixir of post-scarcity ills.

On the one hand, the new leisure time further weakens the traditional moral commitment to work. As Robert Blauner says, "The time, energy, and resources now available for them are causing other aspects of life to compete with work for emotional loyalties and commitments."⁹³ There is a growing tendency to think of leisure as an antidote to the shortcomings of modern work, the idea that self-expression and creativity, thwarted by modern

technology and bureaucracy, can be found again in the pursuits of "free" time: the world of hobbies and sports, learning and the arts, community affairs, and "the delights of consumerism." Already less than half the work force produces all essential goods and services, raising the question: in a world that does not need everyone in the labor force, why worry if some want to work little or to opt out of work altogether? And Kranzberg and Gies conjecture in a utopian vein that in the near automated future, man

will no longer need to do work in the pejorative sense — the unending, bone-wearying, soul-starving toil Instead he will be free to do the work that a robot cannot do, and which expresses his own humanness—to build, carve, paint, write, act, design, to recover the charm of craftsmanship in an atmosphere of freedom.⁹⁴

At the same time, however, social scientists speak of the "psychological terrors" of leisure in a society where Time Off is for many "time on one's hands," or "time to kill." Studies repeatedly indicate that the majority sampled, if suddenly given financial independence, would continue to work; reasons often cited are "negative" ones such as, "I'd go crazy," or "I wouldn't know what to do with myself." And it is not uncommon today, as Sebastian de Grazia says, "to expect a man at retirement to have problems so grave they may even lead to suicide."⁹⁵

Thus the whole question of the work-leisure nexus is extremely complex and uncertain, as speculation about the liberating possibilities of a new era of expanding leisure collide with some hard practical and moral problems.

To begin with, judging from the tenacious persistence of the need people feel to be productively, usefully occupied, it would seem Puritanism has won a lasting victory over idleness. As David Riesman puts it, "Americans remain too unequivocally the children of industry, even when automation threatens to disinherit us, for us to be able to resort to leisure as a counterbalance for the deficiencies of work."⁹⁶ We are, so to speak, as yet ideologically unequipped for it. We saw earlier how relentlessly Americans were taught that "Idleness is a great sin," and that at the very heart of the work ethic lay the conviction that unoccupied hands and time were corrupting. The effects

of such teaching are quite apparent today. People may often do nothing, as Thomas Green says, but always under the guise of doing something. Philip Slater notes how Americans still feel compelled to make a case for "every action having some vague utilitarian value" — "broadening the outlook," "getting a tan," "window shopping," "keeping up," "taking the mind off work for a bit." If not everyone would agree with football coach George Allen that "leisure is that five or six hours when you sleep at night," most Americans are still committed to the value of *occupation*, to the "entrepreneurial notion of leisure" that free time ought somehow to be used profitably, productively, and even efficiently. So whether viewed as part of a long-inculcated, uniquely Anglo-American ethic, or in terms of a universal human need for a culturally achieved sense of potency, there seems little question that the fundamental value of productive occupation persists, the need to feel usefully engaged in something. The question a post-scarcity economy begins to raise for many is what that something might be.

If it is true that, as technically designed and socially organized in our advanced system of industrial capitalism, work generally cannot accommodate the kind of challenging, "worthwhile" activity more people appear to be seeking, one option is to explicitly discourage the traditional idea of work's centrality, to educationally wean ourselves away from the expectation that work will provide a sense of identity and personal worth, and adopt instead the so-called instrumental or compensatory view. If the character of modern work is for many people "inherently antagonistic to the achievement and maintenance of personal and social well-being," asks sociologist Lee Braude, "How much ought we to rely on occupational behavior as a source of self-actualization or personal fulfillment? Perhaps all that can be asked of work is that it give us the means to 'get our kicks' elsewhere."⁹⁷ The value of the job, according to this view, becomes what it enables us to do away from the job. Recent concern about the need to "educate for leisure" is based on the assumption that people should be prepared to find identity, fulfillment, and meaning outside of work.

Some argue that this non-involving, instrumental view is in fact already the norm and cite examples of workers refusing additional responsibility, or

resenting job enrichment efforts that cut into their "daydreaming time" and "underground" social system. "Are there not many workers," Samuel C. Florman asks, "who do not want responsibility, who prefer the comfortable monotony of routine tasks to the pressure-building process of making decisions and being accountable for the consequences? One can wonder who has the better of the bargain, those who are in the rat race or those who are 'beneath' it."⁹⁸

On the other hand, clinicians warn that to be creative in leisure while mindless and passive in work probably requires a schizoid attitude few are able to manage. A number of studies correlate low-level psychic involvement in the job with low-level participation in the larger society. As Robert Blauner puts it, the whole leisure argument

underestimates the fact that work remains the single most important life activity for most people, in terms of time and energy, and ignores the subtle ways in which the quality of one's worklife affects the quality of one's leisure, family relations, and basic self-feelings.⁹⁹

Since the moral leeway the traditional ethic gave to competition depended greatly on the assumption of scarcity, the old rationales for the pursuit of self-aggrandizement lose their force in a society of abundance. People continue to work for money, for the comforts it can buy, but wealth, the "primacy of things," begins to lose value as a source of self-worth. The conspicuous consumption prominent during the early post-scarcity phase, what social scientists call the "competition-consumption orientation," appears to be losing ground among the middle class (and indeed the conspicuously wealthy) to a new concern for social usefulness and even the traditional ideal of moral utility, as post-industrial society shifts its economic focus from goods to services.

While employment still remains a symbol of one's place among the living, work as well as leisure begin to require historic redefinition. The stigma of "idleness" traditionally attached to non-work time becomes untenable, and productive, useful activity can no longer be imagined to occur only within the sphere of paid employment. There are signs of growing resistance to a stringently economic view of human purpose that requires the absurdly redundant

term, "working mother," and that sees human effort as a unit of economic performance, a saleable commodity. As Ralph Helstein, president emeritus of the United Packing House Workers of America put it:

Learning is work. Caring for children is work. Community action is work. Once we accept the concept of work as something meaningful—not just as a source of a buck—you don't have to worry about finding enough jobs.¹⁰⁰

Yet the cultural task of transferring the long-standing moral and social legitimacy of "work" to other forms of activity is a formidable one, facing a number of obstacles. Not least of these is consumerism. The industrial system's capability to manage wants shows no signs of slackening in a society where free time itself is packaged, commercialized, something to be consumed. In the early stages of industrialism, during a twelve-hour day and an eighty-four-hour week of grueling toil, a man worked merely to make a living. In post-scarcity society he works to satisfy wants. So far, the "new leisure society" has turned out to be something of a mirage, and some forecasters believe that with easier work and expanded wants, people are likely to continue opting for more work and income rather than more leisure. Thus if leisure has been trivialized and debased by the same forces that have debased work, the problem becomes one of alternatives to both jobs and leisure per se. This is what Eric Fromm means by his dramatic claim that "Modern man does not know what to do with himself, how to live his life meaningfully, and is driven to work in order to avoid unbearable boredom."¹⁰¹ Thoroughly accustomed to having his time structured and managed for him by institutions—educational, occupational, and recreational—he is more or less trapped in what Etzioni calls an "inauthentic" life. That is, "meaningful human activity" in post-scarcity society is presumably to be found, at least for growing numbers of people, somewhere between corporate industrial work and commercialized leisure.

It remains unclear, however, what "authentic" activity might consist of in a society where the family allegedly continues to decline as a source of human potency and "community service" is dominated by professionalism. The discourse calling for alternatives remains at an academic level. John

Galbraith, for example, sees education's emerging tasks as "the cultivation of interests that are an attractive alternative to work and greater emancipation from demand management." The need, he says, is for "a much larger range of options for the individual person" in the new industrial state that "will allow those who are able to emancipate themselves to do so."¹⁰²

CONCLUSION

Whether it is becoming more or less central as a source of personal identity, work as our industrial society defines it is still for most people the primary means—some say a necessary condition—of being drawn into the mainstream of life, especially as women and minorities look to employment as a measure of full enfranchisement. Indeed, some observers read the recent resurgence of student interest in occupations and marketable skills as a return to 1950's "normalcy." Nevertheless, it is clear that America is grappling in some new and disturbing ways with its beliefs about work, and that its cultural explanations—of the individual's relationship to work, its meaning and place in the scheme of things—are problematic and uncertain.

We have tried to put this new sense of values stress, its rhetoric of urgent change, into some historical perspective, not to minimize contemporary change but to better understand it. Current claims that America is raising its nose from the grindstone, that it is no longer dominated by the work ethic, that it is facing "rapid and widescale changes in worker attitudes, aspirations, and values," must be understood in the context of changes that have been in motion for a long time. It is important to realize the extent to which the socioeconomic evolution of the United States over the last century has carried with it "the seeds of issues now coming to the forefront," and not to view them as faddish or a fallout from the sixties.

But at the same time, it is not necessary to view this as a pivotal or apocalyptic moment in history. Fundamental issues of conflict between the individual and society, as they were posed long ago by the emergence of industrial culture, remain unresolved. Today's society is still contending with the tension between some deep-rooted, abiding values of pre-industrial America and those of the evolving corporate state. The early ethos that elevated work as the aim of life rested on some assumptions about the individual and the nature of society that nurtured a strong faith in self-mastery

and the inherent worth of hard work, and wedded the pursuit of material gain with moral, social utility. The beliefs and values spawned by this fusion went a long way toward defining American culture, the juice and sap of its character as a people, its national confidence. We have seen how the urban-industrial transformation of society challenged and eventually wore away many of the assumptions, but how the core values and ideals persisted. And America has been wrestling since the Industrial Revolution with its original commitment to work, trying constantly as a culture to find new ways of defining and sustaining it. The crux of this ongoing struggle has been the conflict between industrial and corporate definitions of the individual as worker and the culture's deep commitment to ideals of personal sovereignty.

The new sense of transformation is real, for the process continues. The so-called "industrial" version of the work ethic that evolved in the late nineteenth century and more or less held sway through the Eisenhower fifties—the ethic stressing such "employee" virtues as docility, obedience, unquestioning loyalty, conformity to bureaucratic norms and hierarchical authority, subordinating self to the interests and needs of the organization—is clearly under new siege. So are some fundamental assumptions that constituted the "liberal consensus" of the forties and fifties, the confidence that more means better, the presumed harmony of interests between capitalism and social progress. Instead of the long-standing, unqualified faith in constant economic development, society has begun to ask what is being produced and toward what ends.

Yet no fundamental changes have occurred in the industrial organization of work in our corporate society. It is, despite the ameliorative efforts of "human relations" techniques and the expansion of collective bargaining into new spheres, virtually as impervious to individual needs for "quality" as it was a hundred years ago. By most accounts the organizational emphasis is toward increased control and disciplined work routines, through the use of "informational technology" such as computers, mathematical programming and operations research. As Harold Wilensky puts it, "process and product, timing and sequence of tasks have never in history been so explicitly

prescribed."¹⁰³ So it is unclear where the growing "rights consciousness" will lead. Some believe the organization of work must gradually bend to accommodate it; others say expectations, while on the rise, must somehow be lowered. While a movement is underway to humanize the workplace through innovative experiments in job redesign and management methods, there are signs that techniques of the human potential movement, such as est and transcendental meditation, may become widely used to "adjust" individuals to the pressures and tensions of the workplace.

In the meantime there is uncertainty about what education can and should do, as two of its primary functions—promoting full individual development and producing workers—are increasingly seen as contradictory.

Assuming it possible to define the kind of liberating alternatives Galbraith and others call for—that is, alternative ways of directing people's energies and inner resources that can compete morally and socially with "work"—and that cultivating them is a worthy end, nothing in our history would lead us to believe education can undertake the task. As we have seen, public education in America has responded to, not directed, changes in the nature and meaning of work. The school has not functioned as an instrument for defining society's needs but rather as an institution for serving them. Its philosophy and purpose have adapted—not without factional struggles, certainly—to changes in the economic sphere, tending to produce whatever citizenry was needed to serve the nation's manpower requirements and shifts in the social and political climate of its marketplace. Generally speaking, American education has taken the socioeconomic structure at any point in time as a given, and it has sought to adapt or fit people to that structure. And while social critics may characterize the work representative of post-industrial society as a "profound misdirection of human energies" and call for a reformation in our incentives system and the creation of jobs that are "socially useful," there are no indications that the dominant sectors of society are ready to abandon or even modify the assumptions about profit and efficiency that shape both work and leisure in advanced corporate capitalism.

So it may sound quixotic to criticize education for not being "directed toward changing the occupational and economic structure."¹⁰⁴ Yet schools have, in fact, *influenced* the direction of values change—for example, promoting the self-actualization that has fed into the new anti-authoritarianism—albeit for the most part indirectly, fortuitously, and over long stretches of time. Teachers are not immune to the values conflict of the larger society, and exemplary behavior is not always in synch with educational policy. Indeed, many observers believe education is more than a little responsible for current unrest. Michael Maccoby, for instance, believes that

If the upper-middle class critics succeed in further reforming schooling to stimulate active learning in the "open classroom" and through teaching by dialogue, the effect will be to create an even greater tension between the mechanized workplace and the characters of the workers.¹⁰⁵

So if the public school cannot steer change or act as the instrument of social regeneration that reformers for a hundred years have wished it could, there is ample room for debate about what it can do, and demands for more "realistic" approaches to work are not likely to diminish. There is evident need in education for taking more seriously the whole question of values, and of realizing that preparing people for work is not merely a matter of marketable skills and aptitudes and "matching." In an age where "real" motives are hard economic and political ones, we chronically underestimate the force of moral issues in our lives. Americans are queasy about the very word, "moral." But to say that we are moral animals is merely to say we live in the realm of "meaning," values, belief. And the problem is that this realm is an increasingly unstable one, whose parts are shifting perhaps faster and more complexly than ever before. The question is not whether people will continue to work, but how they will view work, make moral sense out of it and integrate it into the rest of their lives. In asking how education can better equip itself to help young people understand the world they are entering, the first step is probably to ask whether conceptions about work underlying current educational practice are in tune with modern realities, based on an understanding of the kind of issues and problems we have been outlining.

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